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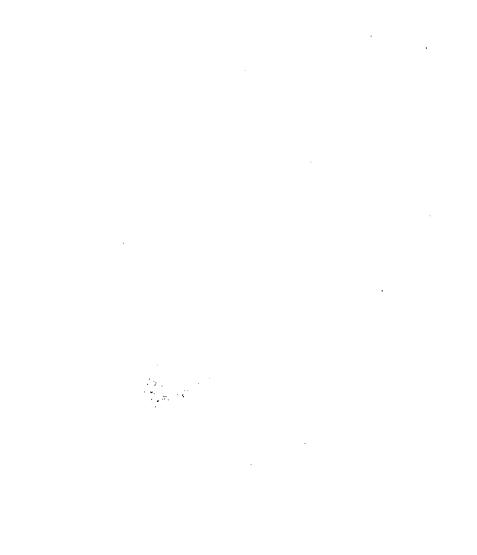


LADY MAY'S INTENTIONS.

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LADY MAY'S INTENTIONS.

A Nobelette.

BY

JOHN POMEROY,

AUTHOR OF "HOME FROM INDIA," "A DOUBLE SECRET," "GOLDEN PIPPIN," " THE SCANDINAVIAN BING," ETC. ETC.



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LADY MAY'S INTENTIONS.

CHAPTER I.

O^{UR} first scene is a boudoir, with everything that betokens wealth, luxury, and modern comfort. A beautiful and refined young woman is speaking to a handsome soldierlike man, in tones of earnestness and energy.

"Oh, take me with you," she said, "at any price, at any risk."

"How can I?" he asked, looking tenderly at her.

"Never mind how! You can if you will. Oh, take me with you!"

"My dearest, how can I?"

"Oh, take me with you!" she repeated.

"I have waited so long; I have tried to be good and patient; you can do as you like, there is nothing to keep me from you—so take me!"

She threw herself on the sofa beside him, and clasped her hands in an appeal that was agony.

He looked sadly at her and spoke.

"It is utterly impossible, May."

She was silent for a moment, then she roused herself, and strove once more to change his resolution. A faint colour passed into her lips and over her neck and face, which were singularly fair, and had been pallid with her strong emotion.

"Think what you will of me," she urged, "say I am selfish and unfeminine, but take me with you. Say it is not nice or pretty for me so to plead, so to throw myself into your care, but take me with you! Take me at any risk, and I will bear the consequences, only do not leave me behind again!" "Oh, May, dear May, do not tempt me !" His strong frame quivered. He bit his lip and closed his mouth firmly, whilst a tear, born not of weakness like a woman's, but wrung from a strong man's resolve, dropped on Lady May's hand.

Her lips seized it. She hoped as she passed them over her own hand, that he would relent. The salt tear from his eye nerved her, once more she said—

"Do not leave me! Think again, Ernest, do not forsake me!"

"Forsake you !"

"Yes, it is too terrible—let me go with you."

"It is impossible."

"I will challenge the world to take my part."

"The world shall not be unjust to you."

"Oh, Ernest, be just yourself, to both of us!"

"My Maybird."

"Be just to yourself," she said, bluntly.

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"You are first in all my thoughts."

"Then take me with you !" she replied, with renewed energy. "Take me, it is not humiliation for me so to plead, for it is my privilege, my right. No one has power to separate us, if you are willing for me to be beside you. Think of the future—of my lonely life, and do not leave me, Ernest."

"It is the future, May, which daunts me," he said with a sigh, as he rose to stand before her. "Your friends would disown you if you imprudently married me. My friends would not sanction a marriage which would separate me so entirely from their society."

"Separate ?" she questioned.

"May, we are very proud, poor and proud, with nothing as you think to be proud of; bear with me a little longer. Obstacles will wear away — promotion, foreign service—something may render me more worthy of your notice."

"More worthy, Ernest?"

"You are too partial, Lady Maybird; it is hard for me to renounce such happiness."

"And think what your refusal is to me."

"My darling, I dare not take you! Bitter repentance might ensue. Could I bear to see you lose caste for me? and live in England in a sort of social ostracism?"

"I should not care," said Lady May.

"You think so now."

"Ernest, you are wrong to refuse me. I wish to change my course of life. I am willing to submit to any risk. You are wrong not to accept me, Ernest. With me for your wife, your position would be altered, you could carry all before you. This self-denial on your part is a fatal mistake; it crushes out my chance of happiness, by breaking all my plans for you and yours; it is unjust to yourself, and cruel indeed to me. You have forgotten, Ernest, that you owe some duty to me."

She spoke proudly.

"Some duty, Lady May ?"

"You have taken my love."

"Your love, May, is the star of my life! For more I must wait."

"Wait? Yes, a man can wait. Others have waited till happiness has been diluted with too much sorrow. We read and know of those who have waited till youth has passed."

"I must remember duty."

"And I," said Lady May, "have promised dutiful obedience to the man I love, and he denies me the opportunity of doing my sworn duty."

"It is your happiness, May, I would seek."

"Then take me with you. Ernest, to leave me here is cruelty. Were you another man, doubt would break in; but I see your fatal error; this delusive selfrenunciation on your part is selfish——"

"Selfish ?" he asked, surprised.

Lady May rose from the sofa, feeling the case was hopeless.

Ernest followed her and caught her hand, but May drew back, saying, "I cannot ask again. I have asked in vain, Ernest, and more than once. I am growing tired of the position. Waiting, and waiting, and enduring. It is not even an acknowledged engagement. You will not let me speak of it. At least I should be free from the supposition that I am seeking amongst the numerous visitors of my aunt one to be to me as you are. I meant to furnish everything-your home, your outfits, and see you settled before the autumn; to do so many things, to aid your mother and your family. I cannot understand your going to India. Your regiment-----"

"May, do not be unjust," said Ernest.

"Unjust? I am not unjust! You refuse to accept happiness. You have nothing to wait for; but, for some mistaken notion, you refuse my gifts you throw back my very heart upon itself. You leave me. A woman is so powerless. You will have change of scene and action, and your sorrow will be less hard to bear, because life has routine and a line of duty for you opening daily. A woman is left behind to suffer and to wait."

Ernest looked at her in mute pain.

"It is true," she responded; "it is woman who knows no change, who is not independent, who cannot choose, but must submit."

"May," he uttered, fondly, "do not be unjust. Would you be free ?"

"Free? From what?"

"From our engagement."

"Easy words, Ernest. Free, indeed! Where is my heart? where is it? How long have I lived for you only? You could not give me back my love. My very soul is yours. I wish you were wicked, a tyrant, anything—a man so rash that you would take me off at any risk—a man without control——"

"My darling, hush !"

"Ernest, I cannot bear to think of the long separation from you; it is bad for me. You are so perfect, so good, so strong. I love you, and wish to be where you are—you are so heavenly. I adore you!"

"Hush! my darling."

"Will you take me with you?"

"I cannot; and I came to say I have to go to-night."

"To-night? Oh, Ernest!"

The words came slowly; questioning what she was loth to believe.

"To-night. Colonel Fortescue has sent the orders."

"Then this is our farewell?"

"I came to say farewell," said Ernest; "and it is very hard to do so. It is almost more than I can bear."

His Maybird looked at him and saw the deep sorrow in his eyes, and like a true woman, she turned comforter, and forgot herself.

"I do not fully understand it," she said;

"but I have worried you and have been very cruel."

She pressed closer to his side, and murmured loving words and little prayers for him, and put back her agony for Ernest's sake, and tried to bear the stubborn facts.

Her resolution did not fail; but the strain on both was very great, and a footman opportunely brought a message that a soldier servant waited.

"Send him here," said the lady.

The soldier said some words from Colonel Fortescue, and May interpreted them for herself. The time was very short, she must be doubly brave; for Ernest's message was to hurry his departure.

She did not throw her arms about him or begin to weep.

After the door closed and the footsteps of the soldier servant died away, she stood before Ernest and looked up into his handsome face. "God bless you !" she said, reverently.

He took the dear and lovely face into his hands and kissed her very tenderly.

"You are a heroine," he said. "God make me worthy of you. In two years-----" He kissed her, prayed God to shield her, and was gone.





CHAPTER II.

WHAT does a woman do who loves with all her heart and she is left behind. because her lover will not be selfish; will not let her make him happy by soaring over all obstacles ? Lady May had offered She had designed so many schemes all. for his benefit and made so many plans for the good of his relations; but left behind, she could do nothing. She was not his wife, she had not the right. All her honest intentions as his dutiful wife were fruitless, or rather nipped in the bud. All her loving help refused. He left her; he said he could not accept so great a sacrifice. What could she do? Nothing. She could not follow him. She could not make him

marry her; it would be useless to attempt more. She knew he was wrong, and had told him so; but she did not blind herself to the noble motives which caused him to refuse her proffered hand and fortune. She did not blame him now he was gone.

Gone! fatal word; gone certainly for two years. Gone to India! Would he be hers in two years? Should they meet again? Could she ever cease to regret this determination of his? This, what a quarter of an hour ago she would have called his fatal obstinacy; but she could not recall him, he was gone! And she put back all queries, for she said, "He is worth the suffering."

Gone! For some moments the boudoir furniture whirled and reeled, and the floor rose to meet her eyes, but Lady May poured some strong essence on her handkerchief and inhaled it.

She shed no tears. She was not one to make herself a "figure," as her maid would

A little gasp, and she swallowed say. down her misery; the fact of separation had begun, and she had to bind herself together and begin the future.

She could say a sharp word when he was present-he had begged her not to be unjust-but in his absence she could trust him. She could never insult Ernest with a doubt.

She remained alone in the small room for some time, her mind overwrought, her nerves over-excited, but calm, determined and unvanquished.

She had moved the foundations in her earnestness, to show her whole heart to Ernest; but he was gone. Her heart resumed its place, her soul strengthened itself by force, and comfort came, such comfort as it was, that he was hers, her all in all even in absence, and that, after two years, he would come again.

His letters would yet come, and the sweet joy of his letters had been very

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great; but they must be changed, and henceforth remind her of his renunciation.

It was hard straining for comfort.

It was summer weather, and in the autumn she had looked for married life, having loved her soldier, and waited for his pleasure; but before autumn days set in, he was gone.

Sound in heart and mind, eager to do her utmost for the man she loved, May had made plans, and arranged what house would suit them, and how to furnish it. Had settled where his mother would be comfortable, and his sister be the happiest. She had tried to benefit his brothers by turns already, but a false pride made Ernest blind. He objected to take "her money and her life," as she had playfully said—he believed that he was acting an unselfish part; but it was not so. He refused and blighted his betrothed, prevented luxury and comfort from lightening his mother's cares, and kept May's money from smoothing the onward path of his brothers. One can do so little in these days without the aid of gold, and gold in plenty was ready for their use, freely offered; for May was heiress and of age, but her soldier lover had his fatal pride, and could not see that to have laid that down could have been magnanimous, whereas his selfish act pained his friends, and left his Maybird still alone.





CHAPTER III.

HALF-AN-HOUR after Lady May left the boudoir, she appeared in the saloon in her out-of-doors dress, and stood before a mirror.

"Such is life! I look just the same!" was her soliloquy. "I suppose women do, though their hearts are breaking. A handsome dress and fashionable coiffure is enough to cover our feelings—it is better so!"

"You are ready first," said a pleasant voice, and Lady May Givendale turned to meet her aunt, the Duchess of Aldborough.

"I have only been here a few seconds," said the niece, gracefully acknowledging the semi-apology. The Duchess was a very busy woman, and never noticed feelings, having her time well occupied, but May was anxious to have the departure of Ernest over, so she remarked—

"Captain St. Auburn is gone."

"You mean he has paid a visit, and did not wait to see me? However, I have his name down for my garden party on Thursday; the Duke mentioned him, so I can see him then."

"He is gone to India," said Lady May.

"Then I will take his name from the list," and her Grace crossed the room to a table on which were writing materials and cards with gilt letters. She erased a name from some tablets, a mere formality to her, but to May a fierce ordeal, for how much did she not miss in that the Duchess had asked him to the garden party, and it had been very difficult to meet and to converse, and the pleasant chance was lost?—and with quiet demea-



nour and heroism of Spartan aristocracy, the betrothed wife of Captain St. Auburn followed the Duchess to her carriage, making no sign of the love which was so true, so all-sufficient, or of the parting which was so sad, and Lady May went to form part of the show at which the world gazes in the long line of carriages which are the first attraction in the London season. Her quiet dignity and air of repose were that afternoon as others, for she had very often suffered and hidden her pain.

She sat beside the Duchess, looking very lovely, and replied to the salutations of her numerous friends and admirers in the Row as formerly. Both these ladies were popular and great favourites, as well for their own sakes as for the high position which was theirs in society, and life appeared to be a happy dream to them. The simplicity of their toilettes also was remarkable amongst the bedecked and

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bedizened multitudes, whilst yet they fulfilled the duties of fashion, and spent sums which showed they had a proper regard to the good of trade and manufactures.

Perhaps no lady driving that day appeared more an object of envy than did Lady May Givendale, yet when she had moments for contemplation, it seemed to her that no sadder heart could beat than hers in London.





CHAPTER IV.

MAY received a short letter from Ernest dated Southampton; a few last words of farewell to England, and a promise to write from Alexandria.

She found no consolation in either, but her attention turned to Indian news and events in that portion of Her Majesty's territories, with an interest which was quite new to her. She read the columns in the *Times* devoted to India, and learned that a new Governor-General was gone out.

"The Earl of —— has left town for India. The Countess has arrived at Donloughty Castle, Maledon, Ireland."

The words raised a strange sympathy in her breast. Another man gone to India and a wife left behind. 22

How she pitied, yet envied, the lady of Donloughty, in Ireland. To be left behind as Ernest's wife, she felt would have been a happy lot compared with her present one.

The same paper noticed the departure of the troop-ship in which Ernest had sailed with Colonel Fortescue, and she learned then that he had exchanged into a different regiment.

"I see how it is," she said; "he could not take me till he attains his majority. Poor Ernest! he has condemned himself to exile and me to separation."

Sorrow begot unbelief, not in her soldier, but in the circumstances to which he looked to reunite them.

"He will not come back in two years, nor in three, I fear!" and this was the refrain after all her cogitations.

The Duchess spoke much of the Governor-General's wife, and wondered she did not go with her husband. "It is so easy now to go to India—quite a pleasure-trip, so different from the time when my dear father went; travelling is quite delightful in these days. I wonder Lady —— did not take so agreeable a journey, but perhaps her family and affairs require her to remain in Ireland; yet I should have gone for a year or two, Indian life is so pleasant."

"Ask her to come here," said the Duke; "she will be glad not to be left altogether at Maledon, I dare say."

A visitor who had lately returned from the East kept up the conversation, and Lady May drank in all particulars concerning India, with her quiet face and most attractive listening manner, which had something deferential that told in her favour.

The Duchess received many guests, and Lady May was as a daughter in the house, and the Duke loved her as one, no family having blessed the house of Aldborough. Accustomed to London life, the usual routine was performed to the end, and the season was prolonged to unusual length.

Parliament and other requirements kept the Duke in town, and Ernest was very far away before the signal was given to prepare to leave the London mansion; nor did Lady May rejoice—the country would not have Ernest, as she had intended, to ride with her in the autumn-tinted lanes, for a short honeymoon somewhere, for she had expected him to obtain only two months of leave.

Without him London perhaps suited her better. In the spring, when the trees were blossoming in Hyde Park Gardens, she had made all her intentions known, for Ernest had admired Lady May for months, and had dared at length to approach her "with permission," he would have explained; for Lady May had given some encouragement since she found her heart declared him to be the handsomest of all her slaves, and she singled him from the ranks of her admirers.

Hyde Park in leafy June had been elysium to her, and the Bayswater Road and the Lady's Mile had given intense satisfaction; Ernest had frequently met her in her early rides, and had also escorted her sometimes in the full tide of the pre-eminently full season.

Lady May Givendale's mother was a beautiful creature who seemed to live to be loved, to exist without the knowledge of fear, and to escape all the trouble and sorrow of human life. A happy childhood, and brief maidenhood, merged into a romantic attachment, and at nineteen she married Lord Givendale, who was equally fond of her.

He broke his heart over the loss of his idolized wife; at four-and-twenty she was lost to him, drowned in a yachting accident off the coast of Scotland. Her body was never recovered, but she left three little children for the father to mourn over.

The fatal 10th of September was kept as a sorrowful anniversary twice, then the two sons, fine little promising fellows, were carried off with scarlatina, and Lord Givendale became careless of his existence. Wifeless and heirless, he moped away some months in a low condition of body and mind, till one hunting morning, having taken enough brandy to give impetus, he rushed at a difficult fence, and ended this life with a broken neck.

Lady May was heiress to her mother's wealth, an ample portion too, though her father's passed to another name. She had been betrothed at birth to young Lord Leamington, the two fathers having agreed that the broad acres of one could be benefited by the hard cash of the other; but the Duchess did not care to keep up the tie. She was the sister of Lord Givendale, and at his death opened her arms to his little daughter, but not to the harum-scarum young Etonian.

Lady May was educated and brought out by the Duchess of Aldborough, but her governess and attendants had heard the story of the betrothal. So whether the young lady objected to be disposed of to her cousin without her consent being asked, or whether the Duchess disliked to chaperone her without freedom, she sent for Lord Leamington and insisted that the engagement should be broken, and that every letter or document concerning it should be burned, and nothing that could be injurious to her niece should remain.

On his lordship's side were no difficulties. He declared he had no intention to enter the marriage state till he was forty at least, and felt glad that his pretty cousin should not be kept so long, and that as he breathed more freely since the Duchess had expressed her wishes, he hoped that Lady May might do so too.

The Duchess was glad he took the affair so lightly—she loved her niece, but she did not like Lord Learnington. He and May had met but seldom, and neither appeared to care that the arrangement made by parents now dead and gone had been removed.

The Duchess had seen a little resentment towards Lord Learnington on the part of May, and on both sides a lack of curiosity, which told her they were certainly not in love.

Lord Learnington left the Duchess with a gay and flippant farewell, and did not present himself again.

Time passed. May's presentation and introduction were not followed by immediate marriage, as the household had predicted, and it was soon discovered that report had made a mistake concerning Lord Learnington. Brought up amongst people of title, and accustomed to receive admiration, the idea of losing an opportunity in Lord Learnington did not strike Lady May as it might a girl of inferior pride; she heard of the Duchess' decision without much sensation of any kind; the prevailing would be relief.

Her time was so much occupied and her mind so well stored, she saw so many people, and her ideas were so enlarged by her rank and position in the world, that it was natural for her to consider well before she gave her heart. She could not have given it unsolicited to Lord Leamington, even for her dead mother's sake; so she had one little bit of rebellion in her composition.

There is something very solid in the character of English girls. They are unlike those of other nations; if well educated, no women are their equals. There is less striving for admiration in our upper classes than amongst others; they seem to care less about it—perhaps rather to accept the right amount with the fact of their existence.

This is far from vanity, which is very different and belongs to another class of beings, mentally and physically lower.

Lady May was so used to her life and the amount of adulation which she obtained that she did not notice it.

Never a selfish girl, she did not look for admiring glances; but her uncommon beauty brought them freely. No eye could rest on her without pleasure.

She had a riding-master at an early age, and continued to ride almost daily; she liked to be in the open air, and was allowed to love her horses.

Thus riding was habitual to her, and it never entered her youthful head that it was anything unusual, or that many girls who would enjoy it are constrained to pass through life without it, because they have not the means to purchase horse and hat and habit, or that they had no grooms or any of the appendages, which habit rendered to her merely the natural surroundings of a young lady of fashion.





CHAPTER V.

THUS Lady May dressed, and rode, and danced, and lovers came; and if suitors for her hand appeared, they were dismissed by the Duke, for the Duchess and May were seen everywhere. No concert or ball, or opera of extraordinary merit, but was graced by their presence.

Captain St. Auburn—her dancing acquaintance of one season—however, became "Ernest" in her heart of hearts the next; and he, so diffident, yet loved her wildly, whilst he acknowledged to himself that he dared not ask her to share his life.

Ernest knew all the luxuries to which she was accustomed, and also the discomfort to which as his wife she might have to submit. He knew what poverty could do; he had seen his mother's struggles, and had heard sordid motives attributed to her prudent speeches.

May, however, had money, and her own; so it was not fair to fancy that her case might be similar.

He gave her not the opportunity to follow her inclination, and he was wrong; for he misjudged Lady May, who was anxious to change her manner of living. Since Lady May had given her heart to him, every hope of the future changed to his habits, his family, and his wishes.

Had he given her credit for the sweet self-denial which was her happiness, and permitted her strong will to vanquish difficulties, no sacrifice could have been too great, no obstacle would have impeded her course.

Such sacrifices are to women the charm of their existence—I mean such women as Lady May, who could rid herself of the trammels of fashion. and break through the routine of years, with the pleasant sensation that she would derive from a longer ride than usual, during which her horse had taken an unanticipated jump, and she had sat him firmly, and kept pace with the others of the party.

She had come to long for change, and above all, for Ernest's companionship. She had never loved any one as she loved him.

Plenty of aristocratic friends were about her, plenty of good *partis* were introduced to her notice, and in a calm conventional manner she was pleased; but below the surface, Ernest only lingered and dwelt.

To be gracious and graceful were as natural to her, as partaking of her daily food and sleep.

After Ernest had declared his love, and week followed week with the unintermitting round of gaiety, May had said that a quieter life would be acceptable. She heard details of the life of Mrs. St. Auburn and of Ellinor, whose prospects were dulled by want of means, and of Ernest's brothers, one of whom had gone to China in a Tea Company's ship, and the other had entered the army, but had his pay only to depend upon—a sore trial when he would have helped the mother too.

Sometimes Ernest mentioned a friend who had studied hard and obtained some Civil Service appointment, but he would usually sigh, after enumerating his friends, and add, "You could not be happy with my people, Maybird."

She, loving and lovely, said only, "Try me," but he did not venture.

And now that he was gone, came more and more strongly the longing to do for them as she could have done had she been his wife. But how could she? As his wife, her ready cheque-book could have soothed anxieties for the mother, and have given

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the sister advantages which must lie dormant now, for two long years.

She told herself how much she could enjoy the busy working world; and the Duchess little guessed that under the placid charms of her niece, was a desire for activity that her Grace would have set down as bordering on vulgarity, though she was high enough in the social scale to be a judge of, and to prize, goodness and worth.

Ernest had shrunk from the Duchess, and so dreaded her denial of his proposals that he induced his beloved to shield him, and to declare nothing to her.

The busy world had charms for her Grace of Aldborough, and she was not anxious for May to marry; so she did not suspect that her niece would rashly give her heart to any one.

He knew the world would blame him for accepting Lady May, were he to draw the Duke's displeasure on himself by asking for her hand, whereas the world would have called him "lucky fellow," and have "very much applauded" what he had done.

Ernest turned coward.

He feared, and rashly tossed up, "Shall I go to the Duke, or exchange for India?"

He tossed, and exchanged.

The strain had become almost more than he could bear; so he cut the cord of honour which bound him to his love, and left the country.

His mother was wounded to the quick. His engagement to Lady May Givendale was the reward of all her trials. She had sent him to college, and had trained her soldier son with her heart's hope, living on the merest pittance to provide for his requirements. She had proudly told her confidential friends; and Ellinor had become tenderly attached to her beautiful sister, from Ernest's tales of her, when the mother's reward, and the sister's hopes, snapped.

Ernest desired comfort, and refused it for them; a hurried visit, a not very lucid explanation, and he was gone.

"Gone to India!" was the burden of their sorrow too. No one could see that he had acted wisely.

Ellinor's heart yearned for a sister, and had looked to Lady May as to a guardian angel, and she could do nothing.

"To be powerless like this, mamma, seems very hard," she said.

"Very hard, my dear."

"Can it be that the Duke refused him?"

"No, I do not think so. I fancy it is his mistaken idea of self-denial."

"He always did give you trouble in his wrong-headedness, mamma."

The mother sighed. She remembered little traits of the same nature when Ernest was at school or college: he had strong notions concerning duty, but it escaped him that in selfishly doing what he believed to be his duty, he was acting for self only, and forgetting that a man ought to act for the sake of others.

"Oh, mamma, how shall we ever see Lady May now?"

" I cannot tell, my love. After two years, your brother says."

"Two years! it is very long to wait, mamma, for what we hoped for this year," sighed poor Ellinor.





CHAPTER VI.

B^{EAUTIFUL} Lady May would have been a great loss to the childless Duchess of Aldborough.

She never said so—never, indeed, made any remark to her niece on the subject of matrimony. She was quite aware that Captain St. Auburn was devoted to May, but many others were the same, and May was free to marry whom she should choose; but the Duchess was very much delighted to find that May appeared to be contented, after Ernest's departure, to remain where she was, and to be her charming and agreeable companion.

The Duchess had a singularly placid disposition. She was clever, and so hand-



some as to eclipse many younger ladies. She had patronage to bestow and duties to perform, and was proud to bring her exertions to a successful issue.

She had never interfered with her niece either, but being a wise woman, left her, as she did politics, to the Duke, were opinion or decision required. Her rooms were rendered pleasant to his partizans and to Lady May's admirers.

The Duchess had learned to gratify her lord years ago, and her well-filled salons were a tribute to her wifely care to please him.

Here May learned her lessons of the great world; and the Duke and Duchess having attained a landing-stage, could repose at intervals, and let the stream pass on.

The high position which many might covet, but so few could fill with the ease and grace which pervaded the house of Aldborough, was theirs by birth. The sweet presence of Lady May was acknowledged to have an extra charm, and her aunt's affection for her was evident without words.

The Duke's life was a public one, and spent nobly, and in the confidence of royalty, but at home he was attentive and affable to his wife.

They were greeted as the Darby and Joan of the aristocracy, and the inevitable publicity which high rank exacted, did not take from the exemplary life they led as regarded each other.

The Queen courted the society of the amiable Duchess for her daughters, and the simple goodness of the Duke was held by the good mother, as worthy of imitation by her handsome princes.

Knowing all this, Ernest could not accept his Maybird's resignation of such society he could not be the one, he told himself, to make her relinquish the mutual claims of herself and the Duke and Duchess.

His noble heart and all the generosity of his nature rose to the occasion; he would sacrifice himself, and leave her free !

She was not free, but bound to wait; for he wavered when he saw her, to say good-bye. She was so determined to benefit both himself and his people.

If he could only have been a little selfish and allowed her to make him happy; but not having married him, she had no power now. He had denied her the divine right of a wife to share his fate for evermore. With that he had denied her his guidance; but in denying her his name, all her intentions were tied and bound within herself.

In solitude she said, pathetically, "I know everything will go wrong now : it is in vain to hope. Something within me says we shall never meet again. He has exchanged into a regiment where he is not known and beloved as in the old one. He has done this foolish thing because he will not let me help him! Deceived himself by professing generosity towards me!

"I long for Ernest only. Amidst all these people, I want only him. I am lonely in these crowds. I know my power, I could make him happy if he would only let me!

"Oh, Ernest, I ought to be with you, or you ought never to have gone! I would have followed his regiment from place to place if needful, and have made the dearest home for him in the tiniest house, or in barrack rooms!

"Even left, if we were married, I could have had his sister, or have joined his mother. The Duchess has her dear good husband, but I could have come to her when she had wished for me !

"Oh! Ernest, my poor mistaken darling, I could have borne it better, even, had our engagement been proclaimed ! "I am in a false position, and am growing tired of it!

"Almost it seems as if Ernest wanted to escape some evil. Perhaps I desired too much; perhaps my wish to help his people hurt him! Could it? No—it is my right, and due to Ernest's wife.

"Then it was false pride to reject me.

"I meant to purchase the majority he sighed for, to freight a ship for Frank, to bring out and to marry Ellinor.

"Oh! it is too hard to renounce all this!

"Was I selfish? Oh, Ernest, I fear we are wrecked. Your caution has driven us to a new and untried shore.

"Two years! And meanwhile?

"I must remain a stranger to the mother and sister for whose love I craved. I can do nothing. To regret is vain. And we had nothing to wait for.

"Of course I have a home here, and food, and comfort; but I wanted to take comfort to his home, to make his brothers proud of Ernest, and through him, to make all happy. Oh, Ernest! Ernest!"

Pacing up and down her pretty room with restless step, such disjointed sentences relieved her too full heart, and enabled her to perform her round of duties to the world again.

Habitually cheerful, the Duchess talked a great deal, in society; and Lady May's silence and deferential manner were unchanged, so even her nearest friends did not know how deeply she felt this portion of her life. She seldom shed tears, but her acute feelings only gave place to a groan and a soliloquy.

Sometimes she could battle for a day or two, but relief must come.

"Ernest, what man did you deceive, by saying that you wished to go to India? and it was only your mad resolve to leave me; to throw back the gift of my life upon myself—life, which is useless, now you are gone !

"If you had wished to go, I could have gone with you. I would have given body and soul for you, Ernest. Of course it is not right to say so, but it is true.

"You are too good, too perfect, perhaps, to please me. I should have been happy with a wilful Ernest, who had said, 'Come with me, Maybird, for I cannot live without you!' and I should have gone and made the sacrifice most willingly. Sacrifice is his fatal word; it would not have been a sacrifice, but a loving service to throw myself and all I have at his dear feet!"

Every day that she yielded to her fit of lamentation, a presentiment of evil grew the stronger, and a bitter fear began to worry her.

"Will it ever fade?" she asked herself; "this sorrow, this terror lest I have lost him? Shall I ever sleep again without regret at waking? It seems as if some chance, some opportunity had been placed in my hands, and slipped away just when I could have seized it. Some opportunity that can never be recalled.

"Oh, had I only been poor! My soldier would have fought for me; he would have made some desperate effort, and have gained me! How noble he would have been, how energetic!

"I should have been so proud to take his name !

"This coming autumn, too, I meant to have it! There was nothing to prevent it! 'May St. Auburn,' I meant to sign my letters, and he has not left me even his name!

"I try to hope, but I know we shall never meet again !

"This bitter fear is wrong. I must make an effort—think of something else, and try some new amusement; but my senses are so fettered by it !

"Ernest, this fatal mistake ! I have not

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even the right to complain of my darling's absence, for he has told no one that I belong to him !"

Thus May spoke of her distant lover, pacing her pretty boudoir; and Ernest in the long night watches thought of her, and buoyed himself up with the idea that he had done his duty.





CHAPTER VII.

A N acquaintance of May's, the young Lady Kathleen Ibbotson, had served as a sort of example to her, for this lady had married a brother officer of Ernest, and followed his fortunes for some years, moving with the regiment to Ireland, and thence to Nova Scotia, whence they were to be sent to India. So May declared she did not argue without precedent, though Ernest knew that Lady Kathleen was one of five or more daughters of a very poor, though noble house, and also that Captain Ibbotson had wealthy mill or mine-owning relations, who could come forward with money, as long as a step could be purchased, or send presents to Lady Kathleen of such a

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nature that his wife could never look for.

Other girls who had come out when she did, had married, and Ernest knew that his lady love longed for his protection, for she was alone when he was not near.

No woman is quite happy without one who is quite her own.

All the flirting and frivolity of the veriest coquette comes from the feminine wish to be nearer and dearer than any other.

May never was a coquette, and she never had occasion to flirt, or to attract attention. She had rather more than she would have chosen; but it came, and was accepted.

Many were around her, many hoped in time to please her, but she wished but for one—her absent Ernest.

A simple, faithful passion filled her heart. All the schemes she made were for the advancement of her husband.

Beautiful and well-educated, she had chosen him; and since he declared his love

for her, no other had acquired power or value in her sight.

May could not fail to charm; with nothing to pretend, nothing to affect, her perfect self, her ease and gracefulness were to be once seen and acknowledged.

Our English upper-class ladies are the most pleasing in the world.

Their easy manner comes of truth; it is natural to them to be as they are.

The heartburnings and martyrdom of a lower grade, the fussy, hasty way, is but a desire to be—what they are not. They would be happier to be contented, and not to make the efforts, which are futile; the world, if deceived for a moment, is quick to detect its mistake.

Lady May Givendale told herself that had Ernest taken her to his mother's house, she would have won all hearts. She meant to do so.

The happiness of being loved, the joy of seeing the effects of her generosity, were

her hopes; but Ernest expected differently.

Had he taken her to his mother's little home, he feared the contrast would be too strong; so, wanting faith, he deprived them all of comfort.

He dreaded that poverty would disgust her: he saw her in the dress and luxury of her aunt's establishment, and it was in keeping with it.

May knew that a quieter style would suit her other part, and she would have dressed as simply, and have taken her place as naturally as his wife, as she did as the niece of the proud Duchess.

One does not play the fresh scene or the new drama with the properties of the first.

The entourage of May would not have been Aldborough House; and she knew that it is half the matter to have the new dresses and decorations to suit the subject of the act. Would Rebecca, as acted by Miss Nielson in Andrew Halliday's piece, be performed in the same dress as she wore for another heroine, Amy Robsart? Certainly not.

The hot days wore away—every one was languid—the protracted season, with its balls, concerts, and operas, repeated itself. The drives in the Park were hot, the morning rides were dusty. The garden-parties were the most fatiguing of all. Yet Lady May was present, and she guarded her perfect health, for it would have been too humiliating to let the world become aware of how bitterly she felt her disappointment.





CHAPTER VIII.

MAMMA, the heat of these front rooms is quite unbearable," Ellinor St. Auburn said, closing still more rigorously the badly-made Venetian blinds of their lodgings in Sutherland Terrace, Bayswater.

"London is terribly hot this year," said the mother, looking up from her writing.

"I begin to think, mamma, we have let our house, and shall not be the richer here."

"We have acted for the best, Ellinordo not unsettle yourself; I know it is dull for you, my child, but what can I do?"

"I have been thinking, mother, that now Ernest is gone, and Frank away, what does it matter where we live? Lady May will never hear that we are still in the respectability of Bayswater. I saw her driving yesterday with the Duchess, and looking so beautiful, lovelier than ever."

"Where were you, Nelly ?"

"In the Park, mamma, trying to get some air, with poor old Madame Céline; but listen to me, mother. When I saw Lady May, it came to me how hopeless it all is. She is nothing to us, and we are nothing to her! Perhaps she thinks so, and has driven Ernest away-----"

"I do not think so, Ellinor."

"Well, she is no more to us than the Duchess herself, or the Queen, or the Empress; so why should we spend more money than we can afford? Let us go quite into the open country, with the grass to walk upon, and nobody to know; and wear our oldest clothes, and eat bread-and-butter, and be comfortable."

"My darling, if I thought you could be comfortable......"

"You think it pleases me to live where I can see great people-you think I am here in the region of respectability, and that it is good for me. Mother, it is not so. Sometimes I envy girls their horses, their saddles, and their grooms; sometimes I wish for their dresses, mother; it is better to take me away, for I begin to have a creeping-in fear, that Lady May Givendale has not been good to Ernest-or why did she not insist on his remaining at home, or else why did she not marry him, and carry out all those fine plans he told you of? I begin to hate Lady May. She might have tried her charms upon some other man. Ernest was so good to you, so good to me, so dear a brother, and I miss him dreadfully, mamma; and I miss—yes, mamma, I may speak-I must. George-I mean Mr. Farndale-also has left us."

" Ellinor !"

"It is quite true, mamma; and I know he meant to come again; but Ernest has left the regiment now, and having exchanged, Mr. Farndale cannot come without him."

Poor Ellinor burst into tears: and Mrs. St. Auburn had no power to console, for she recollected how frequently when Ernest had come to see her, a brother officer had been with him, and whilst he was relating to his mother the intentions of Lady May, George Farndale had made himself so agreeable to Ellinor, that she had indeed cause to regret the rash step her brother had taken; and could she only have gone to Lady May and have known the depth of suffering that was hidden under the tulle and roses, which Ellinor had almost grown to envy, both hearts would have met with sympathy.

Mrs. St. Auburn felt herself in a most awkward predicament: Ellinor refused to be amused with such pleasures as could be procured. An elderly French lady was her frequent companion, the most cheerful

chaperone her mother could find, and Madame Céline enjoyed the richness of London; she talked incessantly, and named the owners of the brilliant equipages as they passed; but Ellinor lost interest in them, and since Mr. Farndale made no sign, she began, with injustice, to lay all her troubles to Lady May.

The heat did not agree with her—that was quite evident; and her mother longed for sea breezes and bathing for her; but there were circumstances which rendered it impossible for her to go far from town, so she could only do her utmost.

She gave up the Bayswater lodgings and took a tiny house on the Great Western line, so that her London duties might be performed, and Ellinor could have the grass to walk upon, without its being trodden by a thousand others. But Ellinor grew very irritable, and was vexed with her fate; and the trees were dusty, even there; and the Great Western whirled away its long trains, night and day, and she began to have a left-behind, and forsaken sort of feeling, which did not pass away, and her mother saw it was more than a passing fancy for George Farndale, which had broken in upon her young life.

To blame Mr. Farndale would be wrong; it was not his fault that Ellinor pined for him so hopelessly; he had visited her with Ernest, and thought her one of the pleasantest girls he ever met, so was glad at any time to go with his Captain, and embrace the opportunity for a conversation with a pretty and accomplished young lady.

Money matters occupied both Ernest and his mother, and he spoke hopefully to her of all that Lady May intended. But he could not accept it. The more needful her help appeared to be, the more did he shrink from receiving it. Meanwhile his sister became attached to his friend, and when Ernest left, it was to break her heart : for a hopeless love did not ennoble Ellinor St. Auburn.

Mr. Farndale called at the house to make inquiries, after the exchange and hasty departure of Ernest, but, "gone away and left no address," was the sort of information he received.

What would he do? How much soever he might regret the loss of Ellinor, the affair did not appear to him in its true light. He could not know how much she wished to see him. The house was let to strangers, and he did not know that she was yet at Bayswater, and walked every day in the vain hope that she might meet him.

His only chance—and he availed himself of it—was to write to Calcutta, and ask Ernest for her new address, and then he also set himself to wait.



CHAPTER IX.

THE Duke was very fond of Ernest's "Maybird." It was in the happy month of May that he made known his affection for her, and he had called her by that name, and in the following May that she had proclaimed all her intentions to him.

The hidden engagement had existed for a year, and she meant the autumn to bear solid fruits, and to find permanent pleasure. Her uncle had read the story, and Ernest felt that he had done so.

He had the highest faith in the Duke's great character, and it was one of his selfinflicted objections, that he had no right to take May from the influence and guardianship of such a man. Many instances of his fondness for his lovely niece had been evinced by the Duke, busy man as he was, and little time as he had to lavish on her.

He had a rare gift of analysing character, invaluable to him as a statesman.

He could sift a man or woman in a few moments, and detect the grains of gold, of which even they, were perhaps unconscious.

In May he found a nugget, and knew that it would never diminish.

Often in his political career he had culled out the noble properties even of an adversary. He never drew forth evil. With a knowledge of mankind he knew that evil must exist, but it was not his favourite subject; he let it pass, and avoided it, as he would avoid the mud of the streets, and step from stone to stone to be free from it.

It is pleasant to dwell on the Duke—to give an example of a mind both great and cleanly, for he used the world with its projecting pebbles as stepping-stones to Heaven.

Ernest knew the Duke's worth; he could not take May from him. Was his love then weak? or was he too noble for this life's duties? If so, a less noble creature were I a woman, would suit me better!

For I prefer the old selfish, all-absorbing love, which claims its own, and will not be content without.

Yes, I would choose the bold and reckless love at first sight, and carry-me-off lover, who would tyrannize over, yet protect me, and exert his strong will with a faithful, hearty, tender passion.

I could not have patience with a reasoning, doubting, questioning man, who must be convinced, and then would doubt again.

I have taken a hero whom I condemn, who reasoned, and so deprived himself of his reward, and her whom he loved of the rights and promises which he could have made stringent. The Duke understood him and saw where his error lay, for Ernest would have liked to combine impossibilities; to live two lives, or rather to let May do so—for he would have had her keep all her aristocratic privileges and luxuries, and yet come to him so burdened; whereas, she could not fill the two positions, and was willing to renounce the one with her maidenhood, and to take the other as his contented wife.

The Duke saw her humiliation, and knew that Ernest had left her energies wasted and thrown back upon herself.

He had testified no disapprobation as to her choice, neither did he appear to understand all her feelings, but he fully entered into them, and he knew, what did not occur to Ernest—namely, that desertion is harder to a woman than it is to a man.

A man goes forth to action, and to novelty : a thousand things which annoyed him are left behind, as well as the one deep sorrow—for give Ernest credit for feeling the bereavement, though his fancied greatness and self-denial bore him up.

His duties occupied his time and thought. A woman remains behind with the old surroundings; the old ennui threatens, and the old forsaken, dreary feeling which women feel so keenly, and are so powerless to prevent.

What courage, what worth, what patience they possess !

The loved voice comes never more. The footstep that used to cause a thrill through all the slender frame, never more approaches.

Outwardly occupied with trifles "light as air," inwardly aching—the inmost heart despairing. The long hours become longer; day after day brings no relief!

May suffered in another way; for daily letters had come from Ernest whilst he was at home, and then ceased; and the time she used to occupy in replying to him became a blank.



The promised line from Alexandria did not come.

In spite of all her efforts, Lady May, whom Ellinor had envied in her luxurious toilette, found the hours were weighted with a leaden anxiety. Her days dragged slowly on; she had lost the tonic of Ernest's presence.

She thought she should get used to it, but his absence seemed harder to bear without his letters. Ellinor would have gloried in the knowledge that May entered the great assemblies, in which she had to appear with the Duchess, almost oblivious of who came near her. The crowd of fulldressed people, the flowers, the music, the perfumes were nothing to her.

Her senses missed the sweet cadence which she loved; she missed the flash of light from Ernest's eyes, and no others appeared to her as his. So dancing, conversation, literature, dress, and fashion mingled; but the fine flavour of life was

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gone—the zest, the wine of existence—and to Lady May Givendale a round of duty appeared, which must be performed. But it required effort, for the spontaneous freshness of youth and hope were over.





CHAPTER X.

E^{LLINOR} did not rejoice when a letter came to her mother dated from Point de Galle.

"Take it away, mamma," she said, " and read it to yourself; it smells of 'Ceylon's spicy breezes,' and detestable heathen hymns."

The mother opened the letter far away from her poor irritated child, whose failing health and hopeless expression roused every tender attribute in her parent.

It was very short, and felt thin and flimsy when out of the envelope :—

"MY DEAR MOTHER,—All I love is left behind, and my heart is heavy with sadness," it began, and tears came into Mrs. St. Auburn's eyes. "Oh, mamma, there you are! crying over that nasty letter. How I do hate everything Indian! I can smell it here, damp and druggy, like sandal-wood, and shawls."

Ellinor railed a little more, but it had become habitual; if not about one thing it was another which excited her nerves, and there seemed to be no joy for her to look forward to, and all the efforts made by her friends to amuse or enliven her were futile.

A very miserable fit also seized upon Lady May Givendale, when she likewise received a letter posted at Point de Galle, on the same day that Ellinor objected to hear her mother's.

Ernest had written to May, but had not posted it at Alexandria—he saved it for Point de Galle; thus a mail was lost, and it seemed old and stale to May, who could not comprehend him.

Wretched as he appeared to be when



writing to his mother, he had written so cheerfully to May as seriously to offend her.

"Does he fancy that I am deceived by his tones of hopefulness? He knows that I resent his absence, and he writes as if it had all been arranged and we were mutually satisfied."

So instead of being cheered she was only the more miserable, and began to feel that she was forsaken indeed.

Yes, forsaken! She had food and clothing, and the actual appliances of life, but Ernest had treated her unfairly, had acted so precipitately as to leave her no time to deliberate. She had in fact no choice. His own movements only regulated the fate of their last interview. He had given her no chance, and she felt herself forsaken.

Till then she had believed herself the first in his thoughts. Now, his forced cheerfulness, his very efforts to amuse her by descriptions of surrounding objects, made the sense of his desertion only to be felt more keenly.

"I ought to have been with him, to have shared his pleasure in these sights, and have seen them with my own eyes," she said, jealous of his apparent satisfaction in them.

Cross purposes never succeed. Had Ernest poured forth his heart in regrets, May would have shed happy tears, and felt contented.

She turned her letter over and over to find some hidden words, some sign that he had suffered whilst he wrote; but it might have been copied from a guide-book, so accurate were the dates and the details he noted down.

"I am growing very foolish, I fear," May said. "I seem to have no strength of mind left. Every letter used to give me pleasure, this only brings anguish and pain. It must be my fault, but how? I am so terribly vexed and disappointed, that I fear I shall grow quite unamiable. I must go out and fight against this. But I think I will destroy this letter—it has grieved me too much to keep."

She lit a taper and burnt it.

It was the first scrap of Ernest's handwriting that May had ever parted with. He had been near London, and when not likely to see her, had written copiously, and she had packets of his letters tied with ribbons, blue or pink, and lastly white, because the later ones had been since the decision concerning the autumn.

She had felt herself a bride, and had tied his letters with white love-knots, and had cultivated white flowers, and had loved the emblematic lily-white.

This letter could not have been put with any of the former ones, so she burnt it.

Throwing herself upon the cushions in the boudoir, she said—

"He never once said he loved me!"

It was the first letter without such

assertions, so she turned very sick and pale.

When Ernest landed at Point de Galle, he made it his first duty to post his letter to May, and to write the short note to his mother; then he dismissed his cares, and drove his sorrow back.

The scented air and gorgeous flowers were pleasant to his senses.

The tropical beauties were present, May was in the past; he had wound himself up some days ago, and had nerved himself to write to her, and to bear the separation resolutely denying himself the blessing of tenderness, and had stood to his post so firmly, that when his Maybird read his letter, she had destroyed it.

At Point de Galle he dismissed all English subjects, did his daily duties, and passed onwards with the troops.

He did not trust himself to add a line from there.



His firmness had been cruel; for his formal letter was acute pain to May, and almost turned her love to jealousy.

Yes; she was jealous.

She thought over his words and the names he mentioned in his letter : people on board who were within the range of his dear eyes—people who could hear him speak and could answer him in return.

May was jealous, not of a woman, or of any woman—I mean in particular. She was jealous of all on board the troopship; jealous of the ship that bore him away for two long years! Jealous that he could give attention to the matters he had told of in his letters—jealous that he could exist without her.





CHAPTER XI.

THE last garden party of the season had to be dressed for that day, and some of the Royal Family were to be present, and the Duchess was very tired, and a happy shower made a diversion and gave time for a little rest; but there was still an inevitable ball at a foreign ambassador's, to be attended in the evening; where the heat was very great in the crowded rooms, and one noble partner had to succeed another, and Lady May's duties were quite as onerous as Ernest's, and she performed them to the full as bravely, though she was conscious that the man she loved had cruelly ill-used her.

The move came next. From Aldborough

House in London, to Aldborough Castle in the country, where the Duke and Duchess were soon immersed in alterations and improvements.

Parliament was prorogued at last, and the end of the season had come; but so late; the Duchess had given two extra balls, and May was worn with over exertion. Latterly, it had been hard to keep pace; gaiety had become irksome and intolerable to both these ladies, but to May the greater share had fallen.

The country, however, gave but little relief. Other people were in the country too, and she found the morning visits and croquet parties, with their fresh toilettes, and lawn teas, had still to be endured.

Such meetings are delightful where the mind is at rest, or where lovers meet or stand within the reach of beaming eyes; but May wore her lovely muslins for no one in particular. Ernest was steaming from Madras to Calcutta, daily further away from her, and she felt sad and out of spirits, because in his last letter he had not said he cared for her.

How true it is that love-letters should be of love. No other subject pleases.

Again, Ernest's absurd self-denial had caused extra distress.

A rash, wild, loving, reckless letter, would have been balm and comfort to forsaken May.

The gay company on the croquet lawn did not amuse her.

Night came, in spite of company and duty, and long dinner—so late as night comes in summer! but it gave, late as it was, time and opportunity for Lady May's soliloquy.

She had no confidante, and she wished for none; so she talked to herself.

"I suppose," Lady May soliloquized, "I ought to be getting used to it by this time,



but as the days go by, it seems to become I feel the sense of desolation more worse. and more, since that letter which he posted He cannot have considered how, at Galle. when we came back from Pau, he met me as if I were his own; he cannot have thought met, when first how we we arrived at Aldborough House this My money too-there it liesvear. and letters to tell me another halfyear's payments are placed to my account.

"How useless, for I am unable to carry out my wishes."

May cast a glance at a great wide wardrobe which stood on one side of herchamber, and gave a sigh.

It contained everything that a bride could require, except the wedding dress.

Yes, she had providently laid in a store of things that would be available in any case of emergency, even as an outfit for India. She fancied that Ernest would come some day, and ask her to "fix the day" in a sudden manner, and that it would delight him to escape the éclât and fuss of hearing about her trousseau.

She was willing for his sake to forego what is a pleasure to women, the excitement of choosing her bridal things, openly, in which every lady appears to take an interest.

There they were, and in sufficient number and beauty to suit any one.

Pauline had curiosity without doubt, but she knew the beauty and advisability of repressing it, and if she suspected that a noble marriage had been for some reason put off, she only hoped Lord Learnington's affairs (or whomsoever was concerned) might arrange themselves before the articles had time to become out of fashion.

Cases also containing silks and matters of value, were hidden away, and the sets of lingerie remained unpacked.



Autumn tints came upon the forest which surrounded Aldborough Castle, with a red and golden glow; frost began to be white upon the grass in the morning, and an extra staff of busy hands were employed to keep the lawns, and drives, and pleasure grounds free from falling leaves, before May received another letter.

Whether the monsoon had been unusually stormy and violent, or whether increasing distance displayed to Ernest that it was useless to write fondly, as formerly, and that silence or avoidance of the mention of his heart's love, was proof of bravery, his letter to May appeared to regard nothing but the rolling of the ship, the rate of knots at which she broke through the waste of waters, and the general health of the troops.

Of himself he said nothing, but enclosed some hieroglyphics which betokened an attempt to find the height of the waves,

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and the atmospheric pressure during the force of the monsoon—equally unimportant and uninteresting to May, whose loving heart craved for news of himself only.

She cared for nothing beyond. The sea was hideous to her fancy, and India a desert of blasted ideas and spent hopes.

She could have given her right arm to be beside him. She could have braved the storm, and have hidden her fears at the tempest for his sake, and he did not even say that he wished for her, or sighed to lose her company.

"I am tired of the position!" Maybird exclaimed. "It is just possible that the constraint he has put upon himself is hardening his heart, and that he does not care for me as he did before he left."

On the occasion of former absences, when



at Pau for instance, or in Paris for a short visit, her letters from Ernest had contained sheet after sheet of tender recollections; and she had been so happy with her loveletters.

The lovely eyes looked out on vacancy, she pondered, and tried to make things out.

"What have I done that he should treat me coldly? Great Heaven! show me how to bear it! And yet I see, even in asking Heaven, that he means it for greater kindness; he thinks that as we are inevitably parted, he will not wear me with regret. He is wrong: the coldness, though assumed, is so sad a change, that it is harder than loving sorrow. His letters are so formal.

"Yet again, we are not new to each other. A man cannot always be apostrophizing 'his mistress' eyebrow.'

"Perhaps he thinks he is writing as if I were his wife. It is not the same to me! Besides, then, he *must* have written tenderly.

"I am very miserable. I have no hope —the separation is very bitter, and I have no strength and no generosity, for I question if it would gratify me to know that Ernest is happy !

"Happy without me! I am jealous of the thought!"

She clasped her face, hiding it in her hands.

"It is too intensely bitter. I must not think of it. I will take a leaf from Ernest's book, and try to think of others; employ myself, and do the best I can."

She struggled against her jealousies for a day or two, and could thank God that she was jealous only of the ship, and of his men.

"I am glad I belong to him," she said; "I would not take my freedom, I want no release, I like to feel how strong my love is for him — how it rises with the strain."

Pauline had dressed her carefully, and having left her alone, May took a long look at herself in a mirror.

"He can do without me, but I cannot do without him ! It is like no other case. I will not give him up. Yet need I bear it ? Shall I try to give him up ? Can I ?" But she considered, and said—

"No."

Very unwelcome thoughts utterly mastered her sometimes; and Pauline knew of restless nights, and there was a visible diminution of colour and activity.

The Duchess also noticed this, but the long and fatiguing season accounted for it to her, who was also glad when a series of wet days set in, which gave some opportunity for rest.

Pauline hoped some *milora* would suddenly appear, for it was evident there was a pining anxiety in Lady May Givendale; and a waiting woman, such as Pauline, was not likely to guess that her lady's heart had gone with a young Captain in a marching regiment.







CHAPTER XII.

THE Duke had less time than he wished for likewise in the country; but May resolved to lay her case before him and seek his counsel.

She watched her opportunity, and one happy morning she encountered her uncle almost free, and looking as if for once he had a moment to himself.

It was a rare circumstance, for he had usually too much to do.

"I am so glad to find you are not occupied," said Lady May, going to his side, as he was standing on one of the wide terraces, enjoying the quiet view of the park and the deer in the autumn sunshine. "What is it, May? Do you want me for a ride, as you see me at liberty?"

"I did not think of that. Thanks, I have had my ride; but if your Grace could give me half an hour, I have a matter which I should like to talk over with you."

"Where, my dear ?—in the library ? Have you papers to show me ?"

"No. And I think you prefer the open air."

"I do, since there are no papers. For in case of those, the library is better."

"I have no papers----"

The Duke looked at her, and saw a graver face than gave him pleasure.

"Come with me," he said, kindly, "to a favourite spot of mine. I am fond of a quiet hour there, and we shall not be interrupted."

He led her to a shaded walk, where under some fine fir trees, seats had been erected. It was a sheltered grove, warm now by comparison with the frosty keenness of the air, but was a cool retreat in summer, where he could retire in those rare moments when he could run down and spend a day or two at the Castle from the heat and turmoil of London.

He placed May comfortably; then said, "Now tell me all you please—there is no fear of molestation."

In a straightforward and candid way, she told the Duke, how Ernest St. Auburn had loved and had proposed for her, how she had never cared for any one else, and was aware of his want of money, but that she meant to supply him: that Ernest had not wished to lower her in the social scale, and dreaded that she might suffer, till at last he had placed an obstacle by effecting an exchange of regiments, and getting sent to India.

She told him her plans for his mother and his brothers, who were struggling with the great world and had to live on very slender incomes, which she had intended to increase; also to purchase his majority for Ernest, and to marry him this autumn; but his independence of spirit had rebelled against all favour, and he had left her and her gifts unappropriated.

Had Maybird made a woman her confidante, the advice given would have been to throw off Ernest, and no more to lavish her tenderness and generosity upon one in every way beneath her; perhaps she knew or suspected this. But the dear Duke had no smallness in his great soul; he heard her with patience through her long recital, then said calmly—

"Your Ernest is a noble fellow, May. He could not take you with him, but what do you say to going out after him?"

"Oh! could I? dear Duke!"

"My dear, it is quite easy. The route is

so sure; ladies pass and repass every mail. It is easier than any other journey, and you will be happier if it be set about at once."

"I never thought of that! When I came to you for counsel, it was with the hope that you could—through Lord N——or somebody, in some miraculous manner—get Ernest sent home again."

"It might not be well for him, my dear; but you can go to him."

"It did not enter my head that I could do so, nor Ernest's, I am sure."

"My dear, he would not like to ask it," said the Duke, "but this is not an ordinary case; it will only be a sequel to your generosity, and as you like St. Auburn, you can answer for yourself, and you are in all respects independent of control. I advise you, therefore, to write to him, and ask by what steamer he can meet you at Calcutta. The English Bishop there can marry you, I will arrange for friends to take you in, and there is a nice Cathedral, and pretty High service, and everything *en règle*, as I dare say you know."

"I have heard so, but----"

"But what? My advice is, write to Captain St. Auburn at once—say, if you like, you have my sanction."

"Thank you; that is what I mean. I have your advice, sir—a man's—so Ernest cannot think I am wrong or unmaidenly, or led away, or anything he would not like."

"As I judge of men, my dear," said the Duke, smiling, "he will be very much pleased."

"Even though he refused me in England ?"

"Yes, he refused with generosity equal with your own; he did not like to tear you from your friends, but he cannot be otherwise than deeply grateful when you follow him to his exile."

"It is so new a thought!" May said. "After wondering whether I could bear the two years, till I resolved to get you to have him sent home again. You do not think there can be any harm in it?" she asked, with a light in her eyes, the first bit of hope that had shone in them since he left.

"Harm ! my dear ; it is a simple thing, not a bit unusual ; and, for you, the simplest way out of your dilemma. You tell me you are engaged to Ernest, who left you suddenly. Take my word for his approval of your step. Your marriage can take place as well in the Indian portion of the Church, as in any church in the Queen's dominions, or in London itself."

"Yes, it can. How glad I am I came to you in my trouble; it seems to be half gone. Men take a wide view of worldly matters—you can see across a hemisphere, and this is a very peculiar case."

So May toyed with her happiness.

"I should like to see Ernest's people," she said, "before I go." "Time enough when you return, my dear."

"You think I had better not go, then ?"

"It might be a little awkward now, and until Ernest gives you the right, perhaps they would not let you help them; in fact, I suppose they might resent the fact that you were aware of their needy condition."

"I understand. You think their pride might be hurt?"

"I do," said the Duke. "Your interference within their domestic regions might seem to savour of undesired patronage, to poor and proud people."

"I understand you fully, and thank you for the kind way in which you have listened to me," May said, as she found the last turn had brought them to the entrance of the grove, for the Duke had risen some minutes ago, as if his time were growing short, and May, glad to move, had paced in happy excitement backwards and forwards with him.



Together they walked back to the house, and no more was said.

The strong-minded Duke had given her solid comfort, and his precious morning moments were wanted elsewhere; he had judged her truly, and knowing the action of her mind, had strengthened her faith in Ernest; and since his wordy praises of the beauties of approaching Ceylon, she had been inclined to think his new life had half obliterated the old, or was in a fair way to do so. But the Duke had spoken of her soldier in a manner that made her proud of him, and showed that he estimated his worth, and believed that he had acted honourably.

The Duke had also seen how hopeless it would be for May to try to be happy without him.

May's eyes were bright now, and open to fresh love and admiration of Ernest.

His acts of self-denial were magnificent, his refusal to relieve his full heart by sentences of tender import—everything seemed fine now in her opinion.

He had determined to make one great and noble sacrifice in human life, to give up the woman he loved because he could not let her renounce her position for him; and he had done all consistently—but his generous spirit forced hers into further action.

To give freely was May's natural disposition, but she could see the reason in the Duke's project, so she could go to Ernest and make him happy.

She could reconcile him to happiness, by her act of limitless faith.







CHAPTER XIII.

SATISFIED with her resolution, whilst the Duke prepared his letters, May also wrote to Ernest.

Invigorated in mind and body, she felt like her old self again.

She wrote fully and warmly, then took a second ride, for air and exercise were necessary to her after this effort.

After the ride she remained for some time alone, collecting material for hope and confidence in her mind, which was more at rest after her letter was written than before.

Then she told over her packages and stores. Articles of all sorts presented themselves to her recollection. With what joy did she consider that the outfit would not

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be wasted, but might be in use this autumn after all !

Ernest would be pleased that she should travel by the Overland Route more comfortably than she could have gone with him in the troopship, which he had told her was very crowded, and in use to the utmost of its capabilities.

Before she closed the envelope she once more read her letter. It ran :—

"My dear Ernest,

"You know that nothing can change me, as you proved long ago; so having been compelled to wait for some weeks, I see the grandeur in your conduct but the more plainly. I was too full of grief to see it all before. "This morning I laid our whole story before the Duke. He has surprised and delighted me by recommending that I should go out and join you at once; so if you are willing, the Calcutta Cathedral can witness our marriage as soon as I arrive; it is for you to say by which mail you can meet me there, and all arrangements will be made to agree. I am quite ready now, and await only your letter to set off.

"I have not said anything to the dear Duchess, who is busy and kind as usual; but she never looks for confidences, and when the time comes for me to go, the Duke's approbation will be sufficient to satisfy her. I do not suppose he will tell her of our interview, unless he thinks it better to do so. He is so wise a man that he will do what is certain to be right; so if he is silent till your letter comes, it may be, that it might compromise you or me if people talked about so serious a matter.

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"I have every requisite prepared; so do, dear Ernest, be selfish, and consider your own wishes; it will delight me beyond belief if you only say, 'Come,' or add, 'as quickly as you can.'

"If you write, 'I cannot bear to be any longer without you,' I shall treasure the words most dearly. You cannot now deny yourself the right due to you. I never could belong to any one else, and your selfdenial has driven me to write this letter; however, as the Duke has recommended me to do so, it is not I who must be blamed.

"Oh, Ernest, I longed to go with you! had you obeyed the impulse and dictates of your heart, I should have been so happy; but obey them now, and let your own happiness make mine. Take the womanly tried heart, as you took the girlish untried heart, on those happy May days which seem now so very, very many years ago.

"Ernest, you will not reject me this time ? but welcome your Maybird."



The thrilling words sped across France, for Marseilles had not ceased to be the route in favour of Brindisi.

Light of heart was Lady May as she watched the progress of her letter to Calcutta by the mail, in the *Times*.

No shadow of doubt cast a fear upon her future now: "He will get my offer to go to him, and will be delighted," was the sweet certainty which filled her hours.

Three weeks—two weeks—one week, then the period came when she could say, "He has my letter! Oh! what will he think ?" and happy, burning blushes suffused her lovely face.

It was very sweet to picture Ernest in his joy that she was coming ! to think how he would read the words over and over again, and to know how happy he would look.

"He cannot blame me," she exclaimed. "He will say, 'She loves me truly, as man was never loved before.'" The days became very short, the croquet mallets disappeared, and keen frost and wholesome cold, cut off the heliotropes and dahlias. Scarlet geraniums even were growing scarce, all others had been brought in, for blackened flowers and frosted stems had hastened the gardeners' movements towards the shelter-houses. The conservatories had treasures in late roses of enormous size, in crimson or dark red—and gay verbenas and orchids, with varieties of all sorts.

The county town near Aldborough Castle had a very good annual flower show, and the Duchess sent wonders of the African or Amazonian rivers, "flowers of all hues, and without thorn, the rose."

Fruit and vegetables too, which gained prizes for the gardener, and envious feelings towards the Castle.

Lady May, with the Duchess and the guests who were staying with them, appeared at the flower show in unusual beauty, for her heart was only waiting for Ernest's permission to give itself yet more entirely to him.

The effect she created was according to custom, for everywhere she went she met with admiration. May was so courteous, and so kind of heart, so full of others, and forgetful of herself, that she was sure to please.

Gay parties surrounded her, and the youngest and loveliest acknowledged her charming toilette and yet more charming manners.

The Colonel of the regiment which had contributed the band, and his officers, devoted themselves to Lady May Givendale. During a period of refreshment, or when one of them led her to where she could the better listen to a favourite piece which she selected from the programme, she led the conversation to military topics, and learned that the regiment into which Ernest St. Auburn had exchanged, would probably be sent to further India, or to the remotest station in Burmah, whilst the regiment he had lately left, was to be removed to a town so near to Aldborough Castle, that she might have seen him almost daily.

It was well to move within reach of the clamour of the instruments, for Maybird's heart beat almost audibly, and she stood as if to listen to the air, whilst its mad excitement should subside. Colonel Fordyce did not think his information had so much effect, but the facts came before her: the route might have reached him on landing at Calcutta; his orders might have been so stringent that he was already again afloat towards far Rangoon, or marching beyond.

Does a martyr's crown succeed to all the sacrifices made like Ernest's? or does energy like Maybird's, fail in the race for eternal life?

At the ball after the flower show, she



had to dance with Colonel Fordyce and with the other officers, with the neighbouring nobility, and the upper bourgeoisie.

Amongst the latter were the chief contributors to the show, after the Duchess of Aldborough herself. These men, whose wealth was in many instances self-earned, were cautious to attend to floriculture as a relaxation, and in some cases outvied all other competitors. Men whose wives were richly dressed, and daughters highly educated, could appreciate the perfect breeding of the Lady May.

Cool arrogance, or what they think is upper class insouciance, is not good manners, nor the wordy condescension of those who lose humility, in thus proclaiming it.

May had no lack of partners, such a trial had never been hers; she had never felt the humbling fact that she owed a partner to the manœuvres or the tact of a clever chaperone, as many a girl has felt who has known, that the favour of a steward brought one partner, whilst she knew also, that had she remained at home, not one would have remarked her absence.

Such a trial as to feel herself a *nobody* had never come to May. Yet so equal after all is human life and its share of sorrows, that with more partners at hand than her card could have contained, May thought sadly again and again of Ernest, and began to wonder whether her letter would go after him.

The writer of these pages was once accused in an old *Saturday Review* of compounding characters of too sweet materials for every-day use. He felt pleased with the clever critic who gave him credit for his power, like the busy bee, of gathering honey every day.

My life has been a busy one, and as I grow older I can thank God for the gift of finding honey in every flower. Good in everything is pleasanter to seek for than



evil; to see the sunny side is the wisdom of philosophy, and to take the sweet and leave the bitter, is like plucking the rose and leaving the thorn.

The night after that ball, all the honey and all the gold of Maybird's character became refined. She saw the trial was before her of protracted, straining silence, inevitable if Ernest were gone to Burmah.

She did not again complain, nor strive against her lot.

The tide which Shakspeare speaks of had gone out in vain for Ernest; he did not take it at "the flood."

May had been the victim, since her intentions were frustrated. The Duke did not approve of her seeking out his mother, or she would have condoled with her and with Ellinor.

The most keen-witted and clever plotter is baffled by an opposing force, and May, seeing her schemes and plans were all upset, and that the haven she had desired, seemed only to recede from her, felt as she had never felt before.

A desert rose before her for a moment a wilderness with which she could never become familiar—and then came forth the strength of the refining. Her pure honey her refined gold—led her meekly to lay her troubles at the throne of God.

She prayed—

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"Oh! Heavenly Father, Thy will be done. Let it be well with Ernest; and for me, let me so turn my thoughts and actions that where I would have found earthly bliss, may all become under Thy provdence, heavenly discipline."





CHAPTER XIV.

N^O further letters came from India. May had said, "Thy will be done," and she could remember her prayer that night.

The Duke asked her in due time about her answer from St. Auburn.

"He is moving up the country with the troops, I fancy," she replied, "and may have had no time to remain at Calcutta; and if he writes on the march his letter must go back there, and so delay may be inevitable."

"It may be another month, then," said the Duke, and the dear old man sighed, for he felt that her chance of going out was passing away with the best time in the year for so doing. "Poor fellow! it is a pity he should lose that letter, May; but, my dear, I half fear some petty revolt is apprehended somewhere up in the new tea territory."

"After which," said May, "he may have time to write and say when he will meet me at Calcutta."

The Duke pressed her hand; no words were needed. Till then, she was where she was beloved and appreciated.

So winter came, and May, with faith unbroken, waited.

Now she could smile at the change in herself. There was a time when she had said she could not bear it; since then "Thy will be done" had been her offering, and a balance had come to her mind. Her cheerfulness was not assumed now, but came of her great trust in God, and in Ernest. She likened herself to a buoy, floating with an unknown length of cable, but riveted firmly to a rock. No more conflicting



emotions were to trouble her peace of mind.

At this period of her probation, a friend of hers came on a visit to the Castle, and after a day or two, she said—

"We are going to visit my sister in Ireland; will you come too, Lady May?"

The Duchess liked Lady Tarbetson, so she said—

"Yes, do, May-it will do you good."

Lady Tarbetson explained: "This is not the regular Dublin season, but we shall like it all the better. My sister cannot go far from the Viceregal Lodge, and we go only to be with her, so you will not see much of the country; but do come, Lady May; we shall live in Dublin, you know."

May hesitated, for she was reckoning the extra time her letter might require in following her to Ireland. Lady Tarbetson said—

"Do not be ashamed of being seen in

Dublin out of the season; it is not like London."

"It is not that," said Maybird, smiling at the supposition. "Thank you—yes, I will go, as the Duchess approves."

"We shall be very glad to have you as one of our family party. We go to our old family hotel; and there are pleasant rides in the Phœnix Park, and the Italian Opera Company may be in Dublin: they sing well there, for the Irish gentry are great critics."

"But you have heard every one in London," said the Duchess.

"Of course we have; but the people go in Dublin for all that. I like the Dublin Theatre Royal very much—it is so different from any other."

May smiled, and her friend ran on-

"The Dublin ladies dress very well, and at the theatre there are plenty of military, and a sort of extra Opera is kept up."

"How so? On the stage?"



"Oh no; amongst collegians in the pit, or visitors to the galleries. Perhaps one begins to sing 'My Maryland,' or some popular song, and a chorus is sung by a hundred voices. Now and then imitations are given very cleverly, of the singers, who do not admire the caricatures."

"I suppose not. Do they try to stop it ?"

"It would be useless; the best way is to have as short an interval as possible between the acts."

"Do you actually like this?"

"Yes, I do really," Lady Tarbetson said, "for it passes away a dull time; and sometimes the music is very pretty. One night a gentleman, who happened to be a favourite, was called for, and he played beautifully on the concertina. They have built a theatre, the Gaiety; but the old Theatre Royal has so much of interesting association that I hope they will not close it."

"You like Dublin, then ?" May asked.

"Yes, very much; poor, dear, dirty Dublin, with its beautiful women and brave men; but I fear it will never be the fashion again."

"You have an Irish husband," said the Duke, with his pleasant courtesy, "and I am very glad that May consents to go with you."

May gave him a grateful look. She knew he understood that change of any sort was good for her.

So a week afterwards, Lady May found herself comfortably established in a quiet family hotel in wide Sackville Street, and she was much amused with the cars, the people, and the funeral processions.

Fine weather, good for her daily rides, and pleasant hours with lively Lady Tarbetson, were very good for May; and she found herself often also at the theatre, and amused as much as her friends could wish at the enthusiasm of the Dublin people.



Lady Tarbetson's brother was at the Curragh, and he frequently joined them, as well as other gentlemen and officers, one of whom was Colonel Hibson, whom May had met in London.

He was a gay, rattling, pleasant man, whose company was sought by Lord Tarbetson and his brother-in-law; and the ladies had it as often as they found it to be acceptable.

Sometimes Colonel Hibson joined them in their box to hear a favourite opera, or they saw him paying his respects to the Viceregal party in theirs.

Sometimes he disappeared for a day or two, when he would return laden with spoil in the way of game, and declare that he had been to the wilds attired in a gun only.

Once or twice May noticed that he did not attend them, but she saw him enter the dress circle at the Theatre Royal with two ladies, who appeared to be mother and

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daughter, and it was some little amusement to Lady May, since he never spoke of these visits, or acknowledged that he knew what operas were sung on those nights, and May fancied that he did not wish Lady Tarbetson to hear about the ladies.

It was not May's affair, and she might not have thought further about the circumstance, but for another triffing one—Colonel Hibson had carried away her fan one evening, and had omitted to give it to her.

When next she saw him she remarked, "What have you done with my fan, Colonel Hibson ?"

"Your fan, was it, Lady May?"

"Yes; where is it?"

"I beg ten thousand pardons. I found a fan in my room, and sent it home, as I believed."

"Home? to whom? it has not come."

The room was full of company, and she was not prepared for his answer. He said—

"I fear I am guilty of a great mistake.



I thought the pretty fan belonged to Mrs. Ernest St. Auburn."

"So you sent it away ?"

May's hands were folded, and she pressed them one on the other, in order to betray no emotion or surprise at the name.

"Yes, but I will send for it. Mrs. St. Auburn lives near, only at Monkstown."

"Pray do not give it another thought." May spoke firmly and proudly now.

Colonel Hibson looked red and vexed at his mistake, whilst she, upon whose heart the sound of that name struck as a death-knell, bore it without an outward token.

"I will get it for you, Lady May," he said, lowering his voice. "Mrs. St. Auburn may be in town to-day, and the evening train will surely bring her for the opera."

"I saw you there with two ladies on Monday," said May, willing to learn all she could, and to know the worst.

"Yes, I took Mrs. O'Grady and her

pretty daughter; they asked me, in fact," said the Colonel, with a little hesitation.

"Did you say Mrs. O'Grady had my fan?" asked May, with affected carelessness, but she hoped some mistake would prove that she had not heard the name she fancied.

"No, not the O'Grady, but her pretty little daughter."

"Who is she ?"

"Oh! a nice little thing—married lately, a little grass widow, and left with her mamma."

"Poor thing; did she wish it?"

"I suppose so; she seems happy enough. But you are not likely to meet her."

"Why so ?"

"She is not in your set."

"It sounded like a good name."

"Yes, Lady May."

"Where is her husband?"

"Gone to Calcutta, I believe."

"With troops? is he gone for long?"



"Really, I do not know. Mrs. St. Auburn never mentioned him."

Again the name.

Lady May's fit of gossip ceased. The fate of a forlorn woman yielded to other topics, but the talking was all on the part of Colonel Hibson, who had been flattered by the unusual attention of Lady Tarbetson's beautiful guest.

May was not yet free, nor could she make her escape.

Lady Tarbetson and her brother had met Colonel Hibson with the two ladies, and in the course of further conversation a visit to Monkstown was proposed. May could hear one say to the other, it was Colonel Hibson to Herbert Rossmore—

"I think I will go now and get the O'Grady to restore it."

"I hate the O'Grady!" said Lady Tarbetson's young brother; "how did she hook a fine fellow to that daughter of hers?" "Really, I as not the much her seat Auburn never mentioned has

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"You know her story; she used to take the girl about the world, and finally settled her fate by special licence at Southampton."

Herbert Rossmore gave a little shrug of disgust, Colonel Hibson left the room.

"Settled her fate," May repeated.

It felt very strange, but very untrue, and yet very benumbing. Lady May did not feel comfortable, but no one should know the shock the name had given her.

She rose, and was approaching a side table, on which were some refreshments, Lord Tarbetson came forward, and as he said a good deal, May drank some iced water, and had time to recover her articulation and presence of mind.

The world stands thus—if one can but hold one's own, each has his own peculiar interests, and these predominate.

Lord Tarbetson was busy with his projects, and Lady May drank the iced water, and her griefs were not suspected.

Colonel Hibson appeared to have changed

his mind, for when May resumed her seat he was beside her.

He brought her a white orchid.

"I suppose," he said, "you thought I had sent the promised bouquet with the fan ?"

"No, I did not," said May, accepting the strange blossom.

"The camellias are falling, and only green and brown orchids were ready till to-day; the bouquet is to come later."

"You give yourself too much trouble for me," May said, gravely.

Colonel Hibson asked himself with a man's vanity----

"Is she jealous of that little St. . Auburn ?"

"I wish you to understand," he said aloud, "that I do not send flowers to the O'Grady, Lady May."

"Where does she live ?"

He gave the number and the terrace at Monkstown, and May silently pained herself with a promise that she would ride that way, and see the house that contained one who used Ernest's name.

Lady Tarbetson received some friends that evening, and the hotel was very full; so it was late before May could obtain a quiet moment; but before she went to rest, she wrote to the Duke, in a firm, decided hand—

"My dear Uncle,---

"I have quite changed my mind, and do not think it would now be wise to follow Captain St. Auburn to India. I am content to let events take their own course, and to be always

"Your affectionate

"MAY GIVENDALE."

Pauline had been dismissed, and May sat with a shawl around her, and a book before her on the table, till every sound in the hotel was hushed, then she crept down the softly carpeted stairs, and dropped her letter into the Post-office box, which she knew would be cleared early in the morning, before the departure of the mail-boat to Holyhead.

Returning silently to her chamber, she laid another sorrow at the altar.

"God help me to bear this, or to unravel the mystery. I cannot yet believe that my Ernest would so forsake me."





CHAPTER XV.

MAY prayed and slept—slept with a power she had acquired, to drive back thought, and because she must not be a "figure" on the morrow.

The morning came with the sense of change; and the first thought was of her note to the Duke.

Then came torture. Could it be true? She had overheard Herbert Rossmore tell his sister about Colonel Hibson's O'Grady, and he had spoken of the daughter as "a terrible little flirt."

Could Ernest have been driven by any circumstances into a marriage with such a connexion? There was a vulgarity about the matter which distressed May.

And—for she was but human—there was a sort of consolation that the common little wife, if she were his wife, was left at Monkstown with Mrs. O'Grady.

"And if," came the torturing thought-"if he has been driven to such a marriage, what will he think of my letter, in which I offered to go to him? If he couldbut I scorn to believe it—the dilemma is but deserved."

Then she regretted, lying on her couch that morning, that she had written to the Duke, for now she could not go to Ernest, and even to see him for a moment and to return, she told herself, could well repay the voyage. All her love for him came to the rescue : he could not be unworthy-yet who was this woman, who dared to bear the uncommon name, both his Christian and his surname?

Hot shame came over May as she remembered if this little flirt could call her Ernest husband, all her own love must be crime.

It was a terrible ordeal for a woman loving as she loved; but the day was come, and she must rise and face it bravely.

Pauline admitted, came the duties of the morning, her budget of letters and her private newspapers.

Her bath refreshed the fever, and her mind determined to be strong; she thought of the dear kind Duchess, who would be so glad to keep her near herself, of the Duke and all her acquaintances, and wondering how the young woman either had become Mrs. Ernest St. Auburn, or had dared to use the name, she dismissed her from her mind.

Lady Tarbetson was in a whirl of visits, and had so much to do all day, that she did not perceive that May was more preoccupied than usual, and one more day went by, very hard to bear, and the night was scarcely welcome, for it required effort which made her head ache to get to sleep, and then it seemed to throb and beat



through all her dreams, which, being of interrupted plans, and some difficulty in reaching Ernest, who was always just where she could hear, but never reach him; made it a relief when a loud rap at the door aroused her, and shattered the bad uneasy dreams into a real something.

Lord Tarbetson's voice followed the knock at her door, saying—

"Will you hasten, Lady May, and come to my wife?"

"Surely. I will be with her in a moment."

Very pale and with a sense of calamity heavy upon her, May hurried into some dress, which Pauline held, and met Lord Tarbetson in the corridor.

"Come and comfort her if you can," he said, as he led her to the large chamber where Lady Tarbetson was sitting with an open letter in her hand, her hair all falling about her, and her face swelled and disfigured beyond recognition, with an agony of weeping.

"Oh, May! this unfortunate visit to Ireland! see what it has cost me! I shall feel remorse for it till the end of my days."

"Dear Lady Tarbetson-" May began.

"Neither you, nor he, nor any one ever can console me. I was so wicked! can you believe it? Last night there came a telegram for him, and I was so wicked as to hide it! I never thought it was of any consequence, and expected it was some horrid business, and I thought he should not be worried with it till to-day, and now the morning post has brought the letter with details.

"What details ?" asked May.

"Why, we ought to have gone, you see, by the morning boat, and now we cannot leave Kingstown till the evening."

"What is the matter?"

"Little Tom is dying."

It was Lord Tarbetson who spoke, for



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his wife had recommenced her anguish of bitter unavailing tears. She had lost all power to stem their current, so Lord Tarbetson explained that the doctor had caused the telegram to be sent, which Lady Tarbetson had cast aside the day before, and she was only reminded of it when he began to read a letter with the words "I telegraphed to you early this morning."

"Then it was yesterday morning !" said Lady May; "you might have gone yesterday evening, and have been at home by now."

"Of course, yes," said Lord Tarbetson. "Do not make it worse, May. I got the telegram and forget it all the day. I only thought of it last night."

It was vain to blame the poor thoughtless lady, who paid so dearly for her carelessness; but Lady May was shown the letter, which gave but little hope of the poor little boy's life.

He had been a delicate baby, nursed by

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hand, and placed under the care of a head nurse of some experience, but of a very wrong though usual sort.

This woman acted according to her lights, but no child could be healthy under her system, however strong it might be at birth. Croup added its alarms now to other infantine maladies, and the mother, who had hitherto neglected him, made the hotel resound with her moans, that she was forced to wait till evening before she could go to him.

May said, "Lie down again and try to sleep. Lord Tarbetson and I will arrange everything, and take you this evening. I trust dear little Tom will be better."

The maid looked sulky, she wanted to get the hair-dressing over, and be free to amuse herself. The lady said—

"I do not care to go to bed again, but get me some breakfast in here, then I will nave my hair done and remain at home, for

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Herbert is coming, and ever so many people, and, May, you can have your ride, and Herbert will— Oh! I \mathbf{am} 80 very miserable!" And again came the tears, so plentifully that May went to prepare for breakfast, which every one required.

Lord Tarbetson was very low about his little son and heir, but he bore the affliction in quiet fortitude, whilst his wife relieved herself with tears.

May knew that here was sorrow that might be known and shown. She did not envy the relief she found in parading her grief.

Colonel Wilson and Herbert Rossmore were at breakfast, which prevented a tête-àtête with Lord Tarbetson. The gentlemen all left immediately after, as there was a levée at the Castle, and Lord Tarbetson had many things to do, preparatory to his leaving Dublin.

Later in the day a brother officer of 9-2

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"Thanks; I rode quite early, and am to leave Dublin in an hour or two."

"Colonel Hibson confided a parcel to my care, and begged me humbly to say he is ashamed of its condition."

The gentleman blushed as he laid on the table May's pretty fan, now quite soiled, and the tassels blackened; beside it he also laid one of pearl and white satin, with fresh swansdown along the top, and a bunch of white violets with a fine camellia in the centre. "You do not recollect me, I see," the gentleman observed, "but let me be remembered as a peacemaker." He gave another blush, and before May could prevent it, had bowed and had taken himself from her presence.

Looking at the two fans, and then at the violets, May sat a little confused, when Lady Tarbetson came in.

"I am so sick of that bedroom! and Greene is so cross at having to pack! I believe she has fallen in love with the waiters in the hotel. She has pulled my hair, and put it up so tightly, I am in agony. Oh! May, has Colonel Hibson got back your fan from that horrible O'Grady woman? What a pity it is; he has made himself quite talked about. In fact everybody knows, and Herbert says he himself makes no secret about his visits there."

May did not speak.

"Your fan looks as if it had been in strange company." May got up and took the soiled fan with the bright steel tongs, and dropped it into a red-hot cavity in the large fire which was burning in the grate.

"If you keep the other," Lady Tarbetson said, quite roused out of her grief at the present movement, "Colonel Hibson will flatter himself you care for him."

"Let him," said May, but she knew that the flowers and the other fan were to prove to her that he had seen the folly of, and had broken off the intimacy with the O'Grady. How could Ernest's name be used by two such women ?





CHAPTER XVI.

A HASTY dinner, Lord Tarbetson in a great fuss, Lady Tarbetson fallen back to tears, Greene miserably sulky, the hour of departure was welcome after the unpleasing events.

Lady May's Pauline and her man Parker were better mannered, and evinced no regret. Westland Row Terminus, Kingstown station, then the passage, which though in winter weather was sufficiently smooth.

Next came the midnight landing, and then every one arranged themselves in the train, so as to sleep as much of the time away as possible. May had slept during the crossing; and now she said, "I have time to take a *little think*, as that handsome American girl whom we met at Rome, used to say.

Lady Tarbetson awoke, and then her lamentations were sad, for she had a presentiment that her baby would be gone.

They reached Euston station, where a messenger awaited them with the sad news.

May had her own servants, and would not let Lord Tarbetson delay a moment.

"You will get some breakfast, Lady May?"

"Yes, thank you, at the other station. I telegraphed to Aldborough when we were leaving Dublin, so they will be prepared to meet me."

Then she took a hasty leave of her friends, and thus the Dublin visit ended.

Herself and servants having obtained some breakfast, she made no further delay, but took the mail train to the station nearest Aldborough Castle; then May, having seen Pauline plunge into a new French novel, resumed her "little think."

"Supposing Ernest could have been entrapped by that O'Grady to give her daughter his name at Southampton, I must give him up. How am I to proceed? The new congenial life for which I planned must be forgotten. How shall I go on ? The same as usual? or shall I make this a standpoint and try some useful life? I cannot look to schools; they are not my I cannot be a Sister of Mercy; I forte. know nothing about such duties. I can give my money freely, but not myself. Oh, God ! I am timid and useless. I could not undertake to go to service daily in the church ; it would be but form ; my thoughts would rove elsewhere. I could not undertake a life of religion. It sounds sordid, but I cannot nurse the sick, but would rather pay trained nurses; or teach children to sing at church—a good choir, well paid, would be better. I should like to do something, but I cannot do the good to Ernest's people which would have been worth doing. I have one solid comfort yet. The ring I gave to Ernest has not come back. He could not have left me—with that ring on his finger — if he had married — Miss O'Grady ! Alas ! for the happy days when I had letters almost daily, and the loving words 'My own darling' never failed to greet my eyes."

At intervals between stations and stoppages, tunnels, and bits of view that were of extreme beauty, Ernest and his love would reign supreme; but there were breaks in her happiness that made Lady May Givendale moralize, and say that human life was very like a railway journey.

At length she could say, "Here comes my station; and the dear, kind Duke has come in the carriage to meet me; how
very good of him. And will he say anything about my letter? Well, with all my thinking, I have settled nothing. He

waves his hand—he sees me—the dear Duke !"

The Duke stood on the platform when the express dropped the letter-bags and passengers for the station.

Lady May was glad to see his grey head and handsome face, and the genial smile with which he welcomed her, brightened her own eyes and thoughts.

The guard and servants having performed their duties, the long train passed out of sight, and the Duke led May to the carriage.

"I am very glad to see you back, my dear. You were right not to go to Clarges Street, for the Tarbetsons' child died of scarlatina."

"And are they gone there?"

"Yes, but the poor child is not there; its grandmother had it and the nurse removed; but they are better to bear the shock alone."

"I thought so too, and told them I had telegraphed to you."

"You are right, my dear. This is my second appearance at this station to-day. Drive on; drive on."

"Your second ! I thought this was the first train out of London."

"So it is. My other attendance was to meet people from the York line, but I came again, to give you a pleasant surprise."

"You have surprised and pleased me very much," said May.

"That is not all the surprise I have prepared for you," said the Duke, gaily; "but you will soon learn. And now tell me would you like Florence or Rome to finish the winter? Nothing is settled yet, and your choice shall be considered."

"Are you going ?" she inquired.

"I fear not. I could not leave; but General and Mrs. Cave are going, and you might like American escort."

"Then they came to the Castle to-day?"

"They did, from the Archbishop's, and are going, as Mrs. Cave says, from house to house. They appear to have many engagements, but all Americans congregate at Rome or Florence, after London, or rather England, so I dare say the visits will diminish."

The Duke made no remark concerning India, and May looked from the carriage to the hills and dales, till the horses bore them swiftly to the portals of Aldborough Castle.

Evidences of late arrivals were all about the entrance hall—rugs and sticks and railway wrappers; and May saw packages in the passages as she made her way to her own apartments, before going to pay her respects to the Duchess.

Large travelling cases with the initials "H. M." were waiting to be conveyed to their allotted places, and in the guest chamber nearest her own, May could hear a somewhat shrill voice giving some directions.

As she reached her door, a figure came

forth from the other room. A frank, nice, handsome girl said, extending her hand—

"I am very glad you are come, Lady May, for I wanted so much to see you again."

It was the same young American lady of whom May had often thought.

"Miss Murray !" she said; "this is a very agreeable surprise."

"Helvetia Murray," said the American, correcting her; and she grasped May's hand in warm American fashion, as she said, with a charming smile which showed her beautiful and even teeth—

"His Grace himself asked me to come with Mrs. Cave, when he heard you and I had met before abroad."

"I am very glad to meet you again."

"And what a nice place this is. But I have not done with the Duke yet. I am a great admirer of men—nice, fine old men, with handsome old heads, like the Duke's. But you have come from Ireland, and have been travelling all night, so I will disappear, or you will wish Helvetia Murray in her native Louisiana."

"I am not tired; pray come into my room."

"No, I will return when you are rested."

"Do not hasten away, Miss Murray."

"Call me Helvetia. 'Miss Murray' is for strangers and waitresses. In America we have no titles ; we drop the Miss and use our proper names. I wish to be Helvetia to you, Lady May." She went on, "With the Duke and Duchess I shall be Helvetia Murray, as I am to the General and Mrs. Cave. May I come to your room often ?"

"When you please, Helvetia."

"I mean of course to your sitting-room, not to your sleeping-chamber."

"We will make my room common property, if you please."

"A thousand times I thank you."

The American lady went away, and the

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Duchess came to welcome Lady May, who was tired and untidy, or fancied so, after her journey and a lost night's sleep.

The Duchess begged of her to go to bed for some hours, as dinner guests had been invited in honour of General Cave. So May took the good advice, and dreamed, not of Ernest, but of Helvetia Murray.





CHAPTER XVII.

HELVETIA MURRAY was very beautiful when May saw her again. Her hair was arranged in rich curls, her bright eyes shone with pleasurable excitement, her finely cut features and clear American complexion made her a fitting rival of Lady May Givendale.

Her toilette was tasteful as May's, and spoke of Paris in every flounce and fold.

Helvetia was dressed with great care, for she wished to be worthy of the Duke's attention, as she was grateful for his invitation.

She was very proud of her American blood, and it was Helvetia's pleasure to look beautiful, and to vie with England's titled ladies, in dress and refinement of manner.

Mrs. General Cave was happy to see her handsome protégée in her best looks. She liked to chaperone Helvetia, and to see the evident approval of all the Castle inmates.

Helvetia was very quiet in society, as quiet as any of her aristocratic friends. The voice which May had heard in the morning, became dulcet as her own in the evening.

After the entertainment ended, Miss Murray dragged her long train of silk and laces to May's sitting-room, and folding an ermine jacket round her, took her station by May's fireside.

"Now that all is over," she said, "I can rest myself." She poked the fire, and put on a piece of the cut timber which was ready to make a blaze. "It is all very fine," she continued, "but it is all very ridiculous, and I feel a great deal the worse for it." May seemed amused, and asked how she was the worse.

"Yes, I am considerably the worse. You must know I am always miserable."

"You miserable?" said Lady May, with astonishment in her voice.

"You could not guess it from my face, you mean ?"

"Certainly not."

"One learns to dress one's face, my Lady, as we dress ourselves, to suit the occasion, but to me it is intense relief to undress; so I am inclined to take off my mask, with your permission, and let you see me in all my hideousness."

"I am not afraid," said May, still amused, for she did not think her American friend was serious.

"Lady May, if you will believe it—I long to be candid with you—I am a very wretched person."

"Can I be of any service?" May asked, with a kind quiver of sympathy.

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"I suppose not. I believe no one can be of use to me; but I have been most shamefully ill-treated, and, in fact, I came to Europe to try to get over my weakness. Perhaps in time I may get oblivious of some things, but to-night I felt how I hated every man who spoke to me—except your Duke."

May smiled; it seemed yet harmless hatred, but Helvetia grew very serious.

"You little think how bad a man can be! And if I were to tell you my experience, night would be hideous to you. Europe has done me little good—none, indeed. To-night has convinced me I am worse."

"Then you came to Europe to avoid some person ?"

"I came to get away from America, to air my Italian and French, and to escape getting married."

"Ladies are generally supposed to be too anxious to marry," said Lady May. "Some of them are," the American said. "I would have married the right man, but wild horses should not make me marry the wrong."

"Then why did you not marry the right?"

"Because he would not have me!"

Helvetia spoke the words with a sort of tragic pathos. May saw in her face a look of such suffering that she pitied her, and acknowledged that hearts can bear, and beat, and throb under pangs of disappointment, even in rich rose-coloured silks or under blonde or ermine.

They both were silent for some minutes. The American lady opened her rose fan and shaded her face from the fire and from her friend's scrutiny; the rich corded silk lay all around her.

Lady May lifted her blonde and blue pale satin gear, and opening the window curtains looked out, where the moon was shining and shimmering on a distant lake. Over the lake was a thick bank of clouds, but again beyond, some deep blue sky, very clear, and studded with glistening stars. May was looking over there, south-eastward, to Burmah, for the Duke had heard that Ernest's new regiment had been sent thither, and had sought the opportunity to tell her so to-night.

Her thoughts occupied her very deeply, for it was Pauline's voice that roused her, by saying everything was ready; so she turned, and let the curtain fall, to find that Helvetia Murray was gone to bed.





CHAPTER XVIII.

THE Duchess always breakfasted in her own apartments, and did not give herself to the public till two o'clock.

She had so many letters to write, and so much absolute business to attend to, that she was forced to seclude herself all the morning.

May usually entertained the lady visitors: basket carriages were at their disposal, or early rides were planned, according to tastes and dispositions.

Billiards were ready, but May did not join those parties, as she liked the open air, and preferred to join those who rode or drove, and she could give them all the distances to every point of view, or to ruins of interest, in the vicinity of Aldborough. On the morning after Helvetia's half confession, which had stirred her hearer so unexpectedly, she asked if she could have a horse, and ride with Lady May, adding, to the Duke—

"You need not be afraid, sir. I shall not upset myself, nor throw the creature, for I have a proper, just, and scientific knowledge of the art of riding."

"Would you like to join the hunting?"

"No, I only wish to ride with Lady May, but many people think that Americans can never do anything but dress and talk."

"You do both very well."

"We take pains to do so, but I mean, that English people misunderstand us in this. We are fond of Paris, and Americans live there as much as they can, so it comes to be supposed that American girls are like French ones, and only do as French girls do. Certainly they do not care for riding, and I, for one American, do."

"You and I will ride together," said



Lady May; and orders were given to that effect, and the Duke asked Helvetia which of the large party of gentlemen she would like to have made acquainted with her intentions, or how many, for he said several would without doubt be glad to join, if they might be told her wishes, and the hour.

"I should like to go early and with only you," said the beautiful American to Lady May; "I should not care to join the show party after luncheon. Riding is not a new accomplishment to me, and I do not want to be admired—I am used to that also," she added in a very matter-of-fact sort of way; "but," she continued, "perhaps it may bore you, and deprive you of the repose you require, for your ride is your only chance to be alone."

"I shall be most happy in your company," May said; so it was planned that both should escape together, and enjoy the morning ride, with a groom only in attendance, and thus leave the Castle and its etiquette behind, and enjoy delightful freedom.

Conscious of her beauty, Helvetia Murray but rivalled the Lady May in her apparent disregard of it.

May liked it, and the admiration which it brought, though she was not vain, only used to it.

Helvetia acknowledged admiration, but neither as a novelty or a pleasure. She had some bitter thoughts connected with it, but spoke as freely of it, as if she would say of a flower, "it is blue" or "it is red."

"Some ladies," she remarked to the Duchess, "appear to take the entire credit to themselves, of being beautiful, as if they could add to their stature or alter the colour of their eyes at will. I believe they do play pranks with their hair, but blonde or brunette must be as God created. One can be grateful for good looks, which is a matter for rejoicing,



like other benefits, but I never can see the use of vanity."

Attired ready to ride, Helvetia looked well in a neat hat and dark green habit.

The Duke surprised May by attending them to the portico, and seeing the two ladies properly mounted. He followed them with his eyes for a few moments from the terrace, and then resumed his writing in his morning room.

The keen morning air braced them, and the paler cheeks of Lady May, refreshed by exercise, became of a lovely rose tint, whilst Helvetia's face showed some stern lines and had a trouble-fraught expression.

"I am glad you are fond of riding," May said at the first pause they made.

"Yes, I like to ride."

Silence followed for a mile or two, till May again broke it.

"I hope this sort of weather will last; it

is so nice, neither hot nor too cold—it is just what suits us."

"Yes, and riding feels like liberty," said Helvetia. "I am not a drawing-room lady, and I cannot stand confinement for long."

"Life might be very delightful, Lady May, but it has so many drawbacks. I cannot think why women could not have been made quite independent; one is only happy by fits and starts, and the chance is so soon over."

"Not with all, I hope," May said.

"I do not know. I used to think I was happy till a break came, and when I got to Europe I meant to be happy again, and I darned over all the thin places in my composition, but the stitches have broken out."

"That sounds nice and feminine," said May.

"I think the first few hours after I got to Aldborough Castle and found you again, were quite happy."

"It is very good of you to say so."

"I do not say flattering words, but true ones. I was happy for an hour or two. I do not like ladies' society generally, nor man's,—unless he be like your Duke—nor boy's, nor anybody's."

"You would have been happier had you married, perhaps," said Lady May, seeing her companion was anxious to converse yet more.

"Sans doute !"

They cantered for some time, and until a nice undulating common became part of their road, no more was said.

"I wish I were settled like those geese," at length Helvetia said, "with never a hope beyond this common. I go floating about, and come to the surface just in the wrong place."

"How the wrong place ?"

"Where I am not wanted."

"You must always be wanted," said May, anxious to soothe her friend. Helvetia Murray gave her a keen look, and appeared to be herself easier after it.

"You see," she said, "I fancy I am looked upon as a capable specimen of the American young lady, for I am always being invited by one or other of our American Ministers. General and Mrs. Cave have me now, and I have been put forward, in many ways and in many places, and I keep up my good character, and comfort myself with the game of propriety which I play, for I play it well. Besides, they like to have me in Paris or Vienna on account of my talent; it is of less value in England, where people are employed and paid handsomely to do what I can do."

"I am at a loss to understand you," May said.

"I have the misfortune to possess a talent."

May looked amused, but she let her American companion explain what talent.

"You are too well bred," said Helvetia, "to inquire what my talent is, because it would imply that you have not noticed it, and I pride myself upon not parading it."

"Will you tell me?" asked May.

"I will tell you how your delightful Duke came to the rescue one evening whilst you were in Ireland. General and Mrs. Cave took me from the Archbishop's to dine at Clomerton Hayes, and Lord Clomerton led me to the piano and stood beside me whilst I played, something better than is ordinarily heard, and a large lady said very loudly to Lady Clomerton-

"'Dear me! how very well she plays! Of course she is professional; where do you get her?"

"You did not play last night?"

"No," said Helvetia, proudly, "the Duke has not asked me yet; but listen: that night, just when Lady Clomerton looked as if she expected war with America at least,

your dear Duke, speaking to General and Mrs. Cave, asked me to come and renew my acquaintance with you, thus relieving Lady Clomerton—and I was revenged on the large woman. I think the man who could rescue me in so nice a manner——"

"And prevent war with America, must be a diplomatist," said Lady May, laughingly.

"It is not by any means the first taunt that has occurred to me; when ladies are a little jealous of me they always whisper 'professional,' and really for myself I rather like it. I was only sorry on that occasion for Lady Clomerton, who turned red. The effect the word has on English ladies is generally to make them avoid me, but the gentlemen do not."

"It takes a great deal of time and practice to play well," said May.

"It does, but is no one in private life to do things well? If one has time, I cannot see that it is prejudicial to play as well as one who has to be paid for so doing."

"Certainly not."

"It would appear to be so, Lady May. I assure you it appears to be quite prejudicial, for when the ladies have said 'professional' to each other and their lords, and the latter have been as affable as before, these ladies try the effect of 'American' in whispers, as if to say, 'Pardon her peculiarities—they are due to her nation.""

"Very few people do play well, either from what is wanting in taste or persoverance."

"That is what I like—I love to conquer, I like to persevere; I care to take any amount of pains. I say, 'Why cannot I do this? others have done it.' After all, it is only a desire to excel which leads America to 'go ahead,' as the English translate our success.

"We have been a new country, with everything to gain by effort. People in England can afford to be slovenly; in America they cannot—every one exerts himself to do well, and Americans can make effort."

"Yes, I think they can."

"And in America," Miss Murray continued, "we have to adhere to rules, and very strictly too. In England things are done more haphazard."

"Do you think so ?"

"It is the case. People learn everything in America; take for instance, riding. In English families, girls—in your county families, I mean—ride, but they learned in haphazard fashion, sometimes well, but frequently what terrible accidents befall them. I learned as things are done in America, with a proper riding-master and regular lessons; so gained confidence by knowing how to act. I have never felt afraid, but I have never met with an accident."

"I also learned with a master," May

said. "I agree with you that it is much better. I feel that experience has made me strong and safe."

"I could tell that the moment you mounted—just as one can tell a soldier: the drill comes out at all times, he walks and moves better than other men."

"You like soldiers then?" said May.

"Women like what they break their hearts over; soldiers to women, however, are not like riding and piano playing: they are not amenable to rules. I wish there were matrimonial rules!"

"How could there be?"

"Oh, very exactly; a code could be drawn up. At present, women have so little chance; even the French plan is better."

"But you said you wanted to avoid marriage."

"I said I would not marry the wrong man."

"I thought," said Lady May, "that in 11-2 America you were more free and independent than we are in England."

"Certainly not. As far as I can judge, English girls are more easily won than Americans; perhaps that increases the difficulties for them in England, by making men more shy."

"Perhaps it does. I think girls in England are very easily won. They are so brought up to be on the look-out for offers of marriage."

"Yes," said Helvetia; "whilst in America we see many more men, and never think that the first one we speak to wants to marry us. Men with us have to work, for one thing, and must work a good deal before they can marry. Our aristocracy is in its infancy. A woman has not an idle life either—rest is for Heaven. We all have great energy, and that gives English people the idea that we are free — yes, we are free — to break our hearts."

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Helvetia broke into a canter as she said the words, with a spasmodic gulp of her heart. The canter became a long one, and it was time to return home, so there was no more confidential talk.





CHAPTER XIX.

MAY asked herself, whilst she changed her dress, "What could Helvetia Murray mean ?"

Perhaps both these women had suffered too acutely to be able to find relief in perfectly confiding, sympathizing friendship.

Light sorrows can be poured forth, and a woman's confidences are to be envied; for the deep griefs are buried, and do not come to the lips.

Each had a deep-rooted trial, and in such a strait, held back and remembered that until lately, they had met only as strangers.

Later the same day, May had to pre-



side over an afternoon tea, for several guests drove from a distance to see the Duchess, and her American and other guests made a large party.

There was no time that day for rest, as a dinner of ceremony also was to come off; and Lady May on coming into the saloon, expecting to be the only one, but desirous to be there to meet any early guest, found Miss Murray already there.

"I dressed early," said the latter, "for I knew you could not give me any time in your own room to-day, and I seem to crave for your society; for, in fact, Lady May, I have fallen in love with you."

"You are very good," said May.

"Tout au contraire, I am very bad, very desperate, one very despicable, if you only knew it; but, like an apricot on a wall, I show the best side."

"The apricot is a very beautiful one."

"Just so," Helvetia said. "You said that quite like a gentleman, only if you were a gentleman you would look very much pleased with yourself for having made a neat speech. It is my yellow gown that has made us think of apricots."

"The lovely face made me say my say."

"'My lovely face,' Lady May, looked so badly a little time ago that I had to paint it up to its proper tint, for I never care to be pitied. I have plenty of sympathy and generosity, and I know what I feel when I see other people look pale and careworn, so I save any one the trouble as regards myself. No one ever feels for me, for I colour my lips and cheeks."

May's cheeks became of a deeper hue than her companion's, and a deeper rose than the gown she wore. It was in her eyes little short of a crime to use cosmetics.

"You think it wicked, I dare say, to paint," said Helvetia. "I have come to know that I am expected to look well, and I try to do so. The General and Mrs. Cave expect me to look well; besides, I have a part to play, and actresses must paint. Nature does for simple folk, but art is needed for good players. You must not think I am quite unworthy of your friendship," she said, with so tender an inflection of her voice that May expected to see tears, but no tears were permitted to flow.

The guests began to appear. The great assemblage had to dine, and during the long dinner, if perchance May and Helvetia's eyes met across the table, a brilliant blush suffused the Lady May, and more than one remarked that she looked lovelier than ever.

Helvetia was magnificent. Mrs. Cave might well be proud of her protégée.

The Duke of Aldborough paid her very distinguished attention, and after standing by her side for some time, he was observed to lead her gracefully to the grand piano, as if soliciting a personal favour.

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Helvetia Murray showed that she was

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pleased. She looked towards Lady May Givendale, and removed her gloves and bracelets, and two diamond rings, which his Grace held as he took his place near her.

There was no crash, no chords, nor noisy run of scales, but in a few moments every one became aware of the finish of Helvetia's performance.

Conscious of melody, full of ease, a sweet thrilling air was sustaining, throughout a trial of skill of either hand, and every tone and semitone of the instrument appeared to take its due share, but was never obtrusive.

Helvetia's music was seldom loud, never obtrusively so, but it was intensely sweet; it rather reminded one of dew-drops or pearls and opals with their changing hues, and an occasional diamond to mark the form or define the metre—so soft, so delicate, so finished was the touch of Helvetia's practised fingers.



People were silent when she finished. She left her seat, and the Duke rose and said, "Beautiful."

He gave her the rings and she put them on. People echoed about the room, "Beautiful, indeed."

This was Helvetia's triumph, for one was present who had listened silently too.

May exulted in her friend. She had never heard her play before, but she could appreciate her talent and perseverance.

Men too, who usually dread what they are pleased to call "drawing-room fireworks," which try their tempers and annoy their ears, listened as if they could listen for ever.

The Duchess said nothing, but May saw some exquisite flowers presented to Helvetia by her aunt, in the most simple manner, half an hour after, and May was very sure that they were freshly cut, and had been sent for from the Duchess's private conservatory, and it was evident that the American was in high favour with her gracious hostess.

Helvetia accepted the floral tribute with a reverence and gentleness which sat well upon her beauty.

The male sex seemed to stand a little in awe of Miss Murray: she was so independent of their flatteries, so fearless and so keen-witted; and quickly as her tongue might reply to them, every man understood that a just valuation was placed on his remarks, which once uttered by his lips were answered by hers, and forgotten.

May was infinitely amused with the cool presumption of a Baronet neighbour, who offered civilities to Miss Murray with an air of patronage, which implied—

"If you take pains to please me, it is quite possible that I may ask you to be Lady Barrington."

He made very flattering sentences, which Helvetia sifted at once, and her replies delighted May, who watched the Baronet's progress, till in most condescending terms he ventured to say something complimentary about America, though in so shallow and transparent a manner as to let his prejudices shine through his speech of forced civility. He spoke as an Englishman might who, for one instant, sought to neutralize the distance between himself and a Dublin Fenian.

"I am American," Miss Murray said, coldly, and Sir Michael Barrington further understood from her tone that she knew more about America than he was able to tell her.

Still he did not leave her.

Helvetia played with her beautiful flowers, and one less determined would have seen that he was dismissed ; he returned to the attempt, and May heard him utter more platitudes, with renewed amusement on her part.

At last Helvetia Murray looked up to Sir Michael's face, and asked"Have you ever been hungry?"

"No, I hardly suppose I have," he stammered.

"Or tired, with hard work ?"

"No, not as I believe you mean."

"Did you ever shoot a man?"

"No, not exactly."

"I have done all these things; but then America is not England," Helvetia said.

The apricot-coloured robe passed from the Baronet's side. May watched him gaze at her as she glided away to a distance, then at the place she had occupied, with surprise at her words and at her absence.

"She is a cool party," said Sir Michael Barrington. "I should like a wife like that; she would shut other fellows up so well."

He could not expect further exciting remarks from Helvetia, so he remained where she left him; and May, in the good nature of her heart, took the vacant seat,



and let the Baronet make himself happy by telling her his hopes with regard to Miss Murray, and boast of his exploits in the hunting field, and his murders amongst the partridges.

She watched Helvetia meanwhile, who, at the further end of the long room, was bewitching three men, and apparently enthralling others; but finally Miss Murray proposed to play whist, and the Duke, delighted, ordered tables to be prepared.

In this Miss Murray was guided by her knowledge of the General and Mrs. Cave, who were in the habit of playing euchre every evening, and she knew they would be glad to be asked to substitute whist, or to teach the American game.

Mrs. Cave liked to have plenty to do; at her "sociable" evenings she provided books or photographs, pictures or rare engravings, to bring people together easily, and to promote conversation.

Helvetia was quite satisfied with the sotto voce conversation of an English evening, but she knew Mrs. Cave's "proclivities;" so Miss Murray played whist, and also avoided a dilemma.





CHAPTER XX.

MRS. CAVE'S superfluous energies were abating, when carriages bore away some of the guests to their homes, and May was very glad to retire to her own room, and to throw off her robes of ceremony.

Pauline left her by her fire, and Helvetia, still in her crocus-coloured satin and tulle, joined her.

May looked up and welcomed her, as she made some apology about having been kept by Mrs. Cave.

"I have just half an hour," said Helvetia, "by which time Mrs. General will have done with our chamberwoman; so let me spend it here with you."

"Willingly; arrange yourself to be

warm, and tell me, Helvetia, what did you mean by that speech to Sir Michael Barrington about shooting a man?"

"I meant what I said, but your friend did not believe me. Truth is a great puzzler."

"Do you mean-?"

"Take off that face of horror! I did not commit deliberate murder. There ! It was during our terrible civil war, and was when in defence of a position. It was truth, and astounded your squire, but it was nevertheless what in your English Courts of Justice, they call justifiable homicide—but we had Do not shudder, it is what is no trial. called all right. Do not repulse me, do not reject me, let me be happy here. Some time perhaps, when I can afford to be 'a figure' with impunity, I will tell you the storyat Rome, for instance. Yes, on Good Friday; say we put it off till then, will you?"

"I will," said May, wondering if she would ever get to Rome again.

"I do not think you seem to care about going to Italy, Lady May. The Duke told the General you were to go with us."

"Yes, I believe so."

"Then you will go?"

"I suppose so. If I go, it will be with you."

"Ah!" said Helvetia, "apricot gown or rose gown, blue gown or dressing gown, it is all the same—all cover hearts, and hearts, I believe, were made, like teeth—to ache."

"Helvetia!"

"Yes, everywhere men torment us; red coats or blue coats, or black ones."

"Do not say so."

"It is true—only hearts are worse than teeth, for teeth can be cured, but hearts cannot. If ever I go in for any of the highflown studies, or for lady doctoring, I will propose a 'coming race' with hearts that will mend, or that can be taken out and replaced by others, and then I will call myself Professor of Heart Mending! I will order new

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materials to be fused with the old, or add 'a new heart given,' to my list of qualities and titles, and I will have a brass plate on my door, or my locomotive home, with Fraulein, or Mademoiselle, or 'Miss Murray, Heart Restorer.' I suspect English people will employ me as much as any."

"Miss Murray!" deprecated May.

"'Heart Restorer!' Lady May. See what a popular lady doctor I shall become! Do . you agree with me? shall I not be popular?"

"I hardly know," May said, sadly; "I suspect some will prefer the poor bruised old ones!"

"Some? Yes, you and I-bruised and battered, yet so faithful."

"Helvetia, do not tell me any more. Do not talk about broken hearts. Some are very faithful, and many lives are full of happiness. I could have——"

"Been happy yourself, Lady May? You will be happy yet—I never can. To-day I felt inclined to adore the Duke."

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"You mean about the Duchess ?"

"Yes, when she showed him her new picture. It is a wonderful photograph, and she seemed so pleased at the entire absence of wrinkles. 'I like the lines,' he said, 'and the original the best.'"

"Yes, the Duke is very fond of my aunt, and she is equally fond of him."

"Well, their hearts are sound and never ache; but they have been well treated. You and I also keep our old hearts, for, you add, we have had something worth suffering for."

"Pardon me," said May, "I never----"

"You never intrude your trials as I do! Do not blush; we would rather have our trials than not have had our love; there is no reason you should shrink from me. I shall not tear open your heart and reveal its secrets; I am not a 'Heart Restorer' yet. Tender love has dwelt in your heart and in mine. You would not change—I would, after all! What custom I shall have ! such poor frivolous hearts ! All the women who never have loved, or who have loved ignobly will be the first to come."

"I think yours would not change," said May.

"No, you judge me more truly than I do myself; so I will wear my wreath of willow, and not exchange it for a crown of roses."

"No cross, no crown."

May said the words very quietly.

Helvetia Murray rose.

"It is time for me to go," she said.

"May, look at me. You befriend me. You are become dear to me." She spoke firmly, as she drew her robes about her ready to go.

"God has given me beauty—I know that, of course—and many have envied me my regular features, my luxuriant hair, my figure, and my power. I never enter a room without rejoicing in my personal appearance, for I gave it all to one whom I loved without limit. For him I am proud of it, and can control my brow, little as it has of placidity just now. The calm is troubled. I am moved, and free from restraint with you. Never fear; I shall not shock you, and shall be as calm as ever, for the strangers in the morning.

"I regret nothing when this mood is on me. I would rather have my pain than be without it, as I would rather have my beauty. I have pride in both.

"You are lovely, you do not envy me, you need not. No one need be jealous of my beauty.

"It is held in check by a crown of thorns."

Helvetia closed the door, and May melted into tears; here was pain, equal to or greater than her own.

No one need be jealous of Helvetia's beauty! What could she mean?

This bright beautiful Helvetia talked of a broken heart; one moment wishing to exchange it, and the next appearing to revel in its sad condition. Seeming to be gay and happy, apt to fit herself for any society, she even lost her Americanisms, and toned her voice to the lower sounds fitting the Duchess's ears, and the luxurious entourage of Aldborough Castle.

Dressing in the most perfect taste, with care equal with her finished style of playing the pianoforte, she yet confessed to the necessity of a touch of rouge, and the ceaseless pressure of a crown of thorns!







CHAPTER XXI.

ERNEST in the meantime had landed his men at Calcutta, and busied himself as men have to busy themselves, on 'first arrival with troops in India.

Half his men were there for the first time, and most of them what they call "seedy" after the voyage.

He wrote some official letters, but none to May, and not even a line to his mother; and if a man has a mother, he generally writes to her under any circumstances, to let her know his whereabouts.

"I shall be moving about," he told himself, "and women will distress themselves to write, and worry if they get no answer. Two years will soon pass, and I must then try to arrange somehow, and get back." The up country station to which he was to march, was difficult of access, and he felt that correspondence would be better avoided.

Ernest thought only of himself, with a "Thank God, there is no one but myself to bear it."

It did not occur to him that May would miss him doubly in missing his letters, and in sparing his mother and Ellinor, the fact that he was not going to remain in the comparative ease of Calcutta, with its balls at Government House, its Opera, and countless acquaintances and English friends, he was cutting off poor Ellinor's hopes, and his mother's only comfort.

He put back his personal affairs in order to hide and forget them, and gave his mind with unnecessary diligence to his military duties; courting discomfort, and bearing hardships, for which no one either admired or thanked him.

There were men in the same expedition

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who had taken out a wife, new to the tropics, and to life beyond her native village, or provincial town, perhaps; but to them no inconveniences appeared to come, and men and women met everything with a cheerful spirit.

One elderly officer had brought out his daughter, who was to be left at Calcutta, and once it came to Ernest that May would have liked Miss Grandison; but he put away the possibility that she could have joined him, and having deprived himself of the company of a wife, he deprived May of the comfort of a letter—perhaps letters to him, would have been reminders too forcible and too maddening.

He gave no orders about letters, and was the only officer who did not urge haste, and give directions without end about their being forwarded.

So determined was his self-denial at this period, that had it been possible for May's offer to join him, to have arrived, he was just in the humour to have refused it; however, he could not get that till by a later mail, and it would follow him to some station on the line of march.

They went by rail to Goalundo, where tea, and jute, and seeds find a market; and a short time has been of use to make a vast change in a district, which has astonished the native chiefs.

Steamers now ply in all directions, and one of the busiest scenes is witnessed, where, till lately only, even human life was scarce.

We seem to be conversant with India and life there. Every one has friends in some portion of the vast country of which Russell has written, and hard dry books have been succeeded by Mrs. Oliphant's and the Honourable Miss Eden's lighter works.

Hindostan, from Tippoo Sahib to the

murder of Mr. Norman at Calcutta the other day, and since that of Lord Mayo, is familiar to us all.

The great mutiny, and the Eastern Bengal Railway, the later roads, the newer bridges, are topics of conversation. How many people we meet were born in India, how many came home last year. Who does not look for the accustomed India Mail on Sunday, as we look for Punch on Thursday, or The Illustrated London News and The Graphic on Saturday?

Ernest knew all this, and that May could see The Times and Homeward Mail. but he denied her personal news.

Uncertainty is very hard to bear. Ernest was sure of May, she was sure of him, but a woman loves the repetition of sweet love.

If I can judge a woman's heart, it says, Trust her fully, but give her sustentation by letters, and she will bear poverty or separation.

Whilst Ernest was running the gauntlet in India, dining with the married officers who had families out with them, and telling all the latest news, May was learning a new lesson—not only that she must wait, but that she must learn to live without him.

Much as we boast of the telegraph and mail systems, our military and civil service men yet regard themselves as exiles, and welcome a fresh arrival with avidity; and Ernest was questioned like all new-comers.

Another mail, and no reply. May was becoming uncertain whether to be glad or sorry that she had not gone to Calcutta.

A year ago had she been told that she could live, with Ernest out in India, she would have denied the possibility.

She was loving still, and brave—brave to bear, and not inclined to take Helvetia into her confidence; she excused Ernest with fond faith, saying to herself that he

was moving where posts were irregular, for he was, as the Duke learned, to be sent in one direction first, then to return, and go with a detachment to Burmah.

May looked at every station on the map, and learned all she could, and except when thrown off it in sleep-for dreams could not be controlled—she was always on guard.

In the night visions, came the odious Mrs. O'Grady, with tormenting familiarity; and she would awake with a bitter pang after conversing with Colonel Hibson and the "little grass widow."

With waking came reason, and May cast shadows back, but never cast off Ernestthat would be to cast off life, to deprive the birds of air, the flowers of fragrance.

One morning Helvetia appeared in a dark travelling costume, and took a very hasty breakfast, astonishing May by an almost abrupt exit, and she scarcely saw any one or heard their regret. Politely as possible ignoring their presence, especially the gentlemen, who followed her to the carriage of Mrs. Cave, and saw her drive away.

"I must come to you," said May, after breakfast, to Mrs. Cave, "for the reason why Helvetia has left so hastily."

"My dear Lady May, I thought you had something to do with it."

"I, Mrs. Cave!"

"Helvetia thinks you are to marry Lord Grousland; it is better to be candid, Lady May."

"I am glad you have said this; do not wound Miss Murray though, for she is very sensitive, but telegraph to recall her, letting her understand that is a mistake. If I marry at all, Mrs. Cave, it will not be Lord Grousland, but one who is at present —not here."

Helvetia returned to Aldborough Castle, as if a day's shopping in London had been



the object of her absence; and Mrs. Cave became aware of May's Indian fever every Saturday, but Miss Murray did not notice it.

Weather permitting, the ladies rode out; and Helvetia's vivacity beguiled the hours, if the morning proved wet.

Her quaint views amused the Duke, and when she called a certain Archdeacon who had paid her great attention, and was much infatuated with his own merit, "A detestable cleric," he fairly laughed.

Other castles were to be visited, but Mrs. Cave and Helvetia remained at Aldborough, the General going to London for a day or two, and returning to them, the Duchess pursuing her own duties, and the Duke giving as much spare time to them as he could. Helvetia said—

"We have no Dukes in America, you know, and I shall be a lioness for having talked to one; people love to hear about what they cannot see."

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"And you will have many conquests to relate."

"Yes, my experience is this. The English aristocracy are in a most enviable position. They have, what Americans crave for. All ought to be good like you and the Duchess, if they only felt the value of their lot in life. I am fortunate in my examples; the kindest hearts have surrounded me, and the highest in the land have evinced a desire to do the utmost good to their fellow creatures. I do like this 'little Island' as they call it in America."

"Contrasting it with your boundless prairies and miles on miles of country ?" said the Duke.

"Yes, it looks so little on the maps; there are people in America, who think it is too small to break in a horse!"

"Americans have large ideas."

"Yes, they like to see England for themselves."

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CHAPTER XXII.

OTHER hosts claimed the General and Mrs. Cave; and Lady May had to pay a ten days' visit, having promised it; so three weeks passed away, but she was back at Aldborough by the time Helvetia returned, who said she got back with a restful feeling of having found the right place.

Nothing further was said about Rome or Florence, or Naples. Helvetia read about strawberries and green peas at the latter place, and said the *Times* correspondent need not have written down his dinner; but that English people always measured climate by their own.

The Duke smiled, and asked what she measured by.

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"I never measure at all, or expect things or people to be the same in different places, or I might go back and remark, there was no popcorn at his Grace the Duke of Aldborough's."

General Cave was a large man with a well stored mind, and a thirst for information, as he was writing some political work of importance. His wife was so amiable, so sociable, so glad to make everyone's acquaintance, that she charmed her English friends by her affability.

She enjoyed society, and was proud of her husband, and of Helvetia Murray. Everywhere Helvetia had admirers, yet no one confessed to have fallen in love with the American beauty.

She was proof against any amount of compliments; brusque, if it suited her, but of surpassing softness when she liked; or when some inner mood was revealed, she was like a lovely lake, rippled by the breeze, cam and radiant in the sunshine. Such a



lake could be stirred by a tempest, and angry foam could crest the mimic waves, when the cold storms of winter should harshly drive it to be moved.

Something in Helvetia's regular profile told this, but her full face spoke of calm, and her eyes had languor or brightness, as her thoughts were moving or at rest. The small mouth had resolution, whilst the whole Grecian face, beautiful and clear, could be hard as marble, if so her fancy needed.

She was well-educated, and had no accent to destroy the illusion which her presence claimed; no mal-pronunciation claimed the ear, she even spoke with the careful enunciation with which a foreigner speaks English.

The Americans are the quickest people in the world, and can at once descry what will be most pleasing in gesture or accentuation.

Helvetia had been long in Europe, and in good society.

She was proud of her American blood, and proud of America, but she could avoid what she felt might be prejudicial to her country, when in England.

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"I am American," as she said it, told all this, as plainly as if she had added, "I am free from your conventionalities, but do not be afraid of me, I respect myself and my country, too much to act in a way that would lower either in your estimation."

She said to a gentleman who showed surprise at her nationality—

"You have admired me, as having found that Americans can be cultivated; you will think better of us soon."

"You look so strong for an American."

"We do not all live upon tea."

"That is an unkind remark," said Lady Emily Huntley, "for we take tea here four times a day."

"I did not mean to be unkind," Helvetia said candidly, sorry to have hurt the pale matron.



"I think you were riding to-day," Mr. Huntley said, who had enjoyed the retort about the tea.

"Yes, we rode fifteen miles."

" From Aldborough ?"

"And back, so made it thirty."

"Do you hunt ?"

"Fox-hunting? No. Scarlet does not suit me."

"You are not obliged to ride in scarlet."

"Or to hunt," said Helvetia. softly.

"Yet you ride a great deal ?".

"I ride, but it is not our American custom to hunt, any more than it is your English one to select a sleigh partner; besides, I dislike scarlet in any way—even on soldiers. You are a soldier, I know, yet I prefer the uniform of sailors."

"You mean you like blue and gold ?"

"And sailors too."

She was talking to Lord Grousland, who was, she knew, a soldier of high repute, and she spoke to the great Commander as if he were a drummer boy, without fear.

"You had friends, I think, in the American War?" he said, gently.

"Yes, and lost them."

There came a softening into her eyes, but she did not lower them from his gaze, and the hero of a hundred fights admired the courage of the American girl.

Helvetia sat with her hands lying one on the other softly on her lap.

She seldom worked silken wonders or employed her fingers when in company. She understood the repose of the *dolce far niente*, and could not see the beauty of crotchet work.

When ladies brought their work, Helvetia assured them she could knit if it were requisite, but she seemed to come into the saloon to talk, and to listen to what other people said.

She was graceful and dignified, quite self-possessed, and seemed to require

neither lace nor embroidery to divide her attention.

Men say that a woman is more attractive when employed upon some pretty work, and she looks up from it to them. Helvetia did not wish to attract, but she was the more attractive.

Some private theatricals were spoken of, and she was asked to take a part.

"I cannot act," she replied.

"I am to be the hero," said Lord Grousland.

"You are one."

Helvetia's little speech pleased him.

"Cannot you be my heroine?"

"No, I am not made of the right stuff."

"Pray allow us to judge," said another voice.

"Indeed I cannot act, but it will give me pleasure to witness the performance."

She dismissed the interloper, but Lord Grousland returned to her side.

"You do not care for the drama?"

"Yes I do, but not for anything sad," she replied.

"Not tragedy then ?"

"Yes, I like tragedy better than comedy at the Italian Opera ; but there it does not make me shudder, it is so delightfully unreal and untrue."

"Yet you like it?"

"I like it because I do not believe it; the music is delicious, and I am not distressed."

"Not even by the music?"

"Music pleases me. I have heard all the best voices everywhere—London, Paris, Vienna, Milan, are the same. You know the best singing is always given when people are dying or dead, for in *Hamlet* in Paris, Christine Nilsson is drowned; and in her Faust—I mean Marguerite—she looks just dead when those exquisite sounds are thrilling through the house."

"And you do not feel sad ?"

"No, it never seems real; but they took me to see *Caste*, and I cried real tears,



and felt vexed, for I do not like to have my feelings harrowed in public."

"Lucrezia Borgia suffers ?"

"Yes, but it is only Titiens singing, and her son is attired in blue velvet and silver, for a fisherman! And Mozart, whom I admire for melodious music, has Don Giovanni and blue lights so mixed—and Leporello is so quaint ! Oh no ; sorrow does not apply to the Opera."

"Your Miss Bateman is harrowing."

"Yes, terribly so, both in Leah and in Pietra. I like her in nothing else. But I have resigned the theatre. I do not like it; it is humiliating to see a woman suffer."

"I agree with you; yet you dislike comedy."

"I fear I dislike the stage, but my opinion is luckily of no importance. I do not like to be made unhappy by sorrows which are only inventions; life has too many which are real."

Lord Grousland was silent. There

seemed to come to him a recollection of some hidden circumstances, and it was well he was called away, to talk about his part as hero of the coming piece.

That night Helvetia might have been a study for one who would have painted "Edith seeking Harold on the Battle Field;" resolve and bravery were defined, but she avoided Lord Grousland, and made no mention of his name in her talk with May in the boudoir.



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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE theatricals of which Lord Grousland was the hero, went off well, and Helvetia and May attended them with the Duchess.

During the long drive home, May said, "You have made many sorry you did not act heroine to Lord Grousland, for poor Mrs. Sinclair did not appear to advantage."

"He should have had a professional actress," said Helvetia.

"I quite agree with you," said the Duchess. "However, Major and Mrs. Sinclair are to come to us on Saturday."

"So many come to Aldborough Castle, there is safety in numbers, I suppose; for my part I was never so comfortable. On other visits people seemed to fancy it would be my pleasure to speculate matrimonially, and I have been very much teazed; but under your Grace's roof, people do not presume, and they let Lady May and me alone."

"I am glad, if you prefer it."

"It depends a good deal upon ourselves, I suppose," said May.

"Not always. I have remarked that some women have abundance of offers, whilst one who would happily marry does not get chosen," said the Duchess.

"The reason is evident to me," said Miss Murray: "I take a manly view of the affair."

"What is your manly view ?"

"First, no man, except a vain and foolish one, likes to be coquetted for. Her efforts to please weary him, whereas a lady who is natural, and minds her own affairs is charming, in a sort of negative way."

"I suppose you understand woman's



weapons," said Lady May, smiling; "for you are very attractive."

"I was not thinking of myself," said Helvetia; "but I do understand a woman's warfare, and I act on the defensive, as you do."

May blushed deeply. In the dark night the carriage lamps flashed upon white walls or hedges, or wooden palings. She knew that Helvetia read her face, but no word had ever been said about Ernest, either by Helvetia or the Duchess, and conversation became general, or rather sank quietly into occasional words, for it was late before they reached home.

The Sinclairs and others joined the circle at Aldborough.

Amongst them came Lady Emily Huntley, and a gentleman followed her, whose face and figure seemed familiar to Lady May, but she could not recall where she had seen him. 359

He bowed as he passed her. as if expecting some recognition, but though May recurned the salutation. no gleam of remembrance came to her eyes.

In the morning of the same day, Lord Grousland had visited the Duke in his sanctum, and had formally proposed for the hand of Lady May Givendale.

The Duke told him that he believed her affections were engaged, but advised him to speak for himself to Lady May; for his own part he hoped to divert her thoughts from Ernest.

So Lord Grousland joined the ladies in their promenade about the grounds, for it was too frosty to ride; and as usual spent his conversation and attention on Helvetia, who had made so little secret to him that her heart was navigating the world with some sailor, that he spoke to her with what she considered manly confidence.

They walked in a sheltered and beautiful part of the Aldborough woods, where ferns

yet remained, and green mosses, under the sprinkling of snow and frost, which glittered like diamonds, in the sunshine.

It was a long, level walk, of a mile or two, with a magnificent distant view.

"Major Sinclair has sent to London for a set of American sensation novels, Miss Murray; he wants to compare them with English ones."

"I wonder what he will get ?" said Helvetia. "I hope he will get one of which I saw a frontispiece, containing 'a lunatic, a corpse, a villain, and a viper !"

"What is its title?" asked May.

"I do not recollect, for I have never read any sensation novels."

"Not Miss Braddon's ?"

"No; nor Miss Broughton's."

"Do you never then read novels?" asked Lord Grousland.

"Oh, yes, plenty, when the fit seizes me, but not 'sensation.' We have 'domestic ones' in America, as you have 'fashionable ones,' and I have read many of all countries, besides Sir Walter Scott's, and I have visited all his localities."

The last word seemed to fall on Lord Grousland's ear as an Americanism, and the quick-witted Helvetia saw that it did so, whilst also his fine ear detected that she used it with determination, as if to declare "it is the right word."

"Do you like Scotland ?" he asked.

"Very much; beyond all I have seen in Europe. I like the unbending honesty of the people, the unflinching religion. I was, I must own, prejudiced in favour of Scotland before I left America, but when I visited the country it more than equalled all my hopes."

"It is a pity I have not the admiration which you possess for Scotland. I seldom go there; never, except when obliged."

"Human life !" said Helvetia. "You are Scotch, so hold your advantages cheaply."

May thought that if her friend were a

coquette she should have fancied her capable of finishing her speech better, but Helvetia never flattered and never flirted.

"Would you rather live, Miss Murray, in Scotland or in London?" he asked.

"Oh, in London, certainly; it is so large, and is a metropolis."

"So is Edinburgh;" he smiled.

"Yes, but London only for a time; it would be too fatiguing. I feel tired of its gold, tired of the parade of wealth, tired of the carriages. I like the drive in the Bois de Boulogne better, with its mixture of vehicles, even cabs; and London is very commercial, after all."

" More so than Paris or New York ?"

"You do not seem to get out of commerce, as we do in New York—at least to my American views."

"Were you at Liverpool?"

"Yes; I like Liverpool. Commerce lies by the docks, and you forget it by the time you reach the park; besides, to Americans,

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Liverpool seems home-like; there are so many ships going backwards and forwards, and you feel en route, and there is much variety."

"What about climate?"

"Liverpool climate," she said.

May said Mrs. Cave had been talking about the Scotia that morning, by which she had crossed several times.

"Yes, Mrs. Cave likes the Scotia; they call it the ladies' boat."

"But you are not thinking of the Scotia vet ?"

"We always think and always talk, but remain in England, you see, Lord Grousland : indeed, Lady May is going to Florence with us, to Rome for Easter, and I hardly know how many more plans Mrs. Cave has for us. For my part, I have seen too many pictures and museums. My head is like the latter, too full, and the contents are faded and dusty."

"I seldom recollect what I have seen,"



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Lord Grousland said, "so I can see them over again with fresh pleasure." Then he reverted to a visit which he paid to the Falls of Niagara, and the States, some time ago.

"Which you have forgotten ?" Helvetia Murray said in a decided tone, and then she walked down a steep slope in pursuit of something which struck her fancy, and, turning, said to Lady May, "It is not worth my ascending that path. I will join you at the green gate."

So Lord Grousland took the opportunity, and told May how his heart and lands were for her distribution and disposal.

But they were not in time to meet Helvetia at the spot she mentioned, for May, having proved to Lord Grousland that her lot was cast with one who was now in India, led him to see that in every way her friend Miss Murray would insure his happiness.

He determined to follow her to Italy,

but he confessed to May that he had met Miss Murray, and had begged her to marry him two years ago, when he was in America, but that she refused him then, and had evinced the same feelings since they had met at Aldborough Castle.

Since May was so unmoved at his proposal, and the two fell into such a friendly conversation, the intimacy seemed pleasing to them both, and the walk was prolonged; and they met the Duke on the way home, to whom no explanation was necessary, for neither Lord Grousland nor May either shrank from joining him, or betrayed any extraordinary feelings.

The great soldier could not have Lady May, but she had told him so with admirable tact and feeling, and he was not driven from the Castle.

When evening came, May and Helvetia met, but not till then, and many strangers were present. If Helvetia suspected how



the walk had ended, she did not display her suspicions. May had come to love her friend, and she sat quietly, as much as she could, indulging hopes that Lord Grousland might yet obtain Helvetia.





CHAPTER XXIV.

A TERRIBLE storm of sleet, and hail, and wind, occurred that night.

May could not sleep. Trees were torn up in the park, and branches snapped asunder, and were hurled about by the violence of the gale.

It was not only the storm that disturbed her rest, for she had much to think of; and strangers, guests, and Helvetia, had occupied her time, and her own affairs had been laid aside for others.

Now, in the silence of night, the evident pain which her refusal had cost Lord Grousland, came to her mind, and she recollected how constantly he had come to Aldborough, whilst she, blinded by her love for Ernest,

had been quite at ease with him, since she believed he admired Helvetia; and it was pain on thinking it over, to feel what encouragement her manner must have given him.

But beyond all that came torture—how engendered on this night in particular, she could not tell; for the face she had seen at the Opera in Dublin, would come before her. It was a very pretty face too; not telling of much education or refinement, but it had a bewitchingness that lingered, nevertheless, and it was evident that Colonel Hibson had found it so.

What had put Colonel Hibson into her head, and that unfortunate little woman whom he had called Mrs. Ernest St. Auburn?

Every effort to dislodge her failed, and May arose in the morning with a headache and a pale face that would have required Helvetia's touch of rouge, to bring it to its former colour. But the Duchess had also been much disturbed by the storm, and felt very unwell and tired. Pauline brought her lady word, that she had just heard this from the Duchess's own woman; and details of the storm followed—how every one had feared, and what every one had dreaded or expected.

The cottages had lost thatch, and the farm-buildings had suffered; chimneys had come down with a crash, and stacks had been overturned.

Sheep and cattle were in danger, either from falling buildings or floods, for the river had overflown its banks, and all the ponds, and the lakes their boundaries.

At breakfast it was so dark that lamps were talked about, and the gentlemen all went out to see what mischief had been done. A pitiful moan of the wind arose, and the damages had to be quickly repaired, for a heavy fall of snow was anticipated. The sky was dark and threatening, and the cold became intense. Prognostications were verified: the snow began to fall, and continued for some days, and the silence was a complete contrast, for before the snow fell, doors had creaked or banged, windows had rattled and timbers groaned, noises had howled in the chimneys, and twigs had dashed against the panes of glass.

Helvetia was the life of the party.

"Well, I liked the storm of wind," she said, as she looked across the park, "but it was so misty, and obscured in the distance; it is lovely now in the snow. I am glad we are not on the move, Madame," she said to Mrs. Cave.

"Thank God for a good roof over our heads," said Mr. Sinclair, Major Sinclair's elder brother, who owned a large adjoining property.

"Yes, and from the calm it must have been very bad at sea, Helvetia," said May.

"Very," she replied, still looking out.

"Have you friends at sea ?" Mr. Sinclair asked, joining Miss Murray at the window.

"I suppose so. Sailors are often at sea."

"Oh, sailors ! they are used to it !"

"But sailors have perished at sea!"

Lord Grousland entered the room as Helvetia said the words. He saluted the Duke, and then busied himself about breakfast.

"I thought," said Mrs. Sinclair, "you were gone, Lord Grousland. I am sure you went away a few days ago, and I thought you were never to act again, and I felt so sorry; but you are come back."

"Yes, I arrived by the last train, so slept at the Bell at Aldborough, and am in time for breakfast at the Castle."

Servants hurrying about with coffee, meats, and fish, for him and other hungry ones, made it difficult for Mrs. Sinclair to satisfy her curiosity.

May was much amused; she knew also

that Lord Grousland had taken leave, but she could not ask him what had induced him to come back, as Mrs. Sinclair seemed disposed to do. Fragmentary observations reached May from Lord Grousland, who was not allowed by the theatrical-loving lady to end his meal in peace. Luckily her hopes took the form of his desire to act with her again, so May let him be persecuted, and did not attempt to go to the rescue.

Major Sinclair told May that he was ordered to Rangoon, and the name took her to task to prevent showing any feeling to him, concerning Ernest. Major Sinclair seemed to think his wife would have ample opportunity to display her histrionic powers, in a short time.

"There is no happiness," he said, "like being sent from place to place; one only regrets Indian life, when one has to stay too long in the same."

"You are a lucky fellow to think so," his brother observed. Helvetia was talking to several people, but gleaned a mixture of "Egypt," and the "Hebrides," with "killing storks," and "private theatricals," at Rangoon.

She imagined that Lord Grousland had come back to Aldborough on Lady May's account, and felt so much pleased with him for so doing, that she was inclined to be confidential, should he give her any opportunity.

Her mind was busy taking in new pictures and new truths. She watched the Duke, who, having finished his breakfast, acted the urbane host and country gentleman.

Her respect for him never wavered.

Some one was telling a story of the Poet Laureate, and the Duke listened with an amused face to the description of a person who had followed the poet about one day at the Academy, expecting to hear words of poetry or inspiration; but the Laureate, after silently looking at his catalogue and the pictures, said to the lady who was with him, "Take care of the children for a minute, whilst I get a glass of bitter ale."

Helvetia's "detestable cleric" was on her side, away from the others, and being in a mood which led him to bore unusually, and to be very talkative, as he had a habit of repeating every sentence and making his hearer tell him twice every word, Helvetia had full occupation, and yet she watched Lord Grousland keenly.

A movement was made from the room where the débris of breakfast was left on the table, and Lord Grousland, as they entered the morning-room, saw Mr. Sinclair in earnest conversation with Lady May, and he therefore came to Helvetia and the Archdeacon, to whom he told of a certain church which was undergoing repair, the rector of which remarked on the long delay, and said he feared it would be a very expensive matter. "It will have the effect," said his hearer, "of doing what you have been trying to do. It will bring the whole parish to repentance."

The Archdeacon having made him repeat and explain his story, went away, and Helvetia had some minutes' pleasant talk, she fancying Lord Grousland was jealously watching Mr. Sinclair.

The Irish Countess had arrived, whose husband was gone to India, and the very amiable lady was already seated at her point-lace table, surrounded by a group of ladies anxious to learn new stitches.

If May hoped for particulars concerning India, she gave it up. Helvetia said afterwards, in their boudoir—

"I suppose the lady is welcome on her husband's account, but it is well she did not go with him; she prefers Ireland."

"She is pretty and amiable," said May.

"Yes, and persevering, for really her lace is equal to Spanish point. I asked if

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she meant to go to India, and she told me her husband wished it, but she was afraid of snakes!"

"Poor lady !" said May. "And I daresay you went into raptures about them, and made her believe you liked rattlesnakes, anacondas, and crocodiles."

"No; I agree with Major Sinclair, she can do her lacework as well, or better, in Ireland. By the way, Mr. Sinclair has given me Tatters."

"Then I suppose he means to give you himself?"

"He did mean it, but I told him my heart was not here."

"Shall you keep Tatters?"

"Surely I can have a dog, without taking his master !"

"As you please."

"I do please. Tatters is a nice, raggedlooking dog, and pleases me. Mr. Sinclair is a very nice man, and gave me Tatters. Besides, I am sure Mr. Sinclair was going to offer Tatters and himself to you-only for Lord Grousland."

"Let us go out with Tatters now," said Lady May, rising; "it is rather slippery, but the bright air will do us good."

And very soon the two beauties, in sable and sealskin jackets, were out in the snow, attended by Tatters, and a grave Newfoundland called Monster. They did not heed distance, but stepped out as far as the town of Aldborough, and were returning in the dusk, when a voice said—

"Whose is the doggie ?" and Lord Grousland caught them.

"Tatters is mine," said Helvetia; and she emulated Tatters' powers of getting over the ground, and a second time left May and Lord Grousland.

"I fear your kind schemes are failing, Lady May Givendale."

"How so ?"

"Mr. Sinclair is first in the field. You see she accepts the little brute Tatters." "Tatters only," said May.

" Is it true ? But I suppose ladies make confidantes of each other ?"

"I think not; we do not, at any rate."

A vain man would have felt sore that May had not published the honour he had done her. Lord Grousland gave her a look of grateful thanks.

"Do you not know then whom she cared to wait for ?"

"She led me to understand that a sailor had her promise."

The frieze coat drew very near.

"Lady May, give me your advice. I came back to see you about this—this sad affair this sailor, in fact. I know she has lost sight of him—and he is drowned, in fact."

"Drowned! how very sad."

"Drowned, and some time ago. In the brig *Euphorbia*, off Cape Horn."

"Poor Helvetia!"

" Lady May Givendale, you must befriend

me. This curious compound of attraction,

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obstinacy, and fidelity, gave her heart to a young American officer, who actually did not care for her, or else felt that he was not a suitable husband for her. The war came : he fought on one side, her relations on the other; civil war distracted the land; this man was ruined, intended to go to San Francisco, made some noble renunciation of actual property in favour of his friends, and was drowned-shipwrecked, in fact. Now, Lady May, you understand me fully. I had met Miss Murray, and cared for her; learned this, and-it is not to be wondered at-I cared for you. Your candour and friendship I prize most highly. A drowned man can never be brought back to earth. Miss Murray may be led to recollect me as your friend. Will you plead for me?"

"Dear Lord Grousland, your own merits and the Duke's advice, would be more than mine."

"Will you, Lady May, do what you can for me?" "I will. Meantime, can you have patience, and not distress Helvetia with the sad loss of the *Euphorbia*?"

The great soldier saluted her and vanished.

"Poor Helvetia!" sighed May. "Her first love drowned! Surely she will not refuse that splendid alliance. When did he learn this? He came back, he says, to tell me."

She sought the Duke, and told him everything, from Lord Grousland's offer to herself, to his latest information concerning the *Euphorbia*.

"So he proposed once in America to Miss Murray?"

"Yes, they met at Saratoga."

"And instead of taking umbrage he is inclined to try again, having failed in the interim to carry off my Lady May?"

The Duke began to put away papers as he was speaking.

"Have you been out to-day?" May asked.

"No, my dear. I spent my playtime with Sybil, who never likes the cold."

"But she is better to-day."

"Yes, bronchitis better, but I never like her to be here in snow. We must get her away soon, my dear. Sybil says she is happier at home, but we must get her southward."

"Will you come out now for half an hour? It is growing dusk, but is very pleasant."

The Duke agreed, and May walked with him in the park. The moon began to shine upon the snow, and at some distance they met Lord Grousland, whom the Duke greeted warmly.

He said he was going to the Bell, to order his traps to be put up, but the Duke begged him to arrange to remain.

"For," he said, "we shall all break up soon. The Duchess gets ill with snow, and we must get out of it—Sybil must, at any rate—and our American friends get letters telling them of congregations of their countrymen at Florence; the General's book is gone to the printer's, and all things are bearing towards a move."

Lord Grousland agreed to go to the Bell and give contrary orders.

"I never should have thought of that man falling into love-making, May; yet that he should care for you, my dear, is not surprising, and if he gives us that pleasant Miss Murray for a neighbour, I shall be very glad."

"But his military duties?" said May.

"I fancy he would retire," said the Duke.

The Duchess was able to appear at dinner, and Helvetia was in great beauty.

May felt for her, knowing the anguish she would experience could she guess the subject of the confidential hours which she had spent that day with Lord Grousland 232

and the Duke; but Helvetia was full of spirits.

Mr. Sinclair wearied her with attentions. He would bring pictures to her mind.

"I am so tired of academies and pictures," she replied ; "I feel like the bird of paradise in *Punch*—they go from memory like last year's boots."

"What has a bird of paradise to do with Punch or boots?" Major Sinclair asked.

"Better write to *The Times* and put in for a column. But I have a vague idea that somebody told me he knew the writer of that article, and the better ones about Bunter and the steam launch."

"Yes, that is in 'My Health,' by....."

The Duchess sent a message, begging that Miss Murray would favour them by playing, and her clever hands were soon ready for the pianoforte.

She broke into Scotland's melodies, and

chose the most harmonious and the most touching.

The Duchess was a Scotchwoman, and the lovely player received heartfelt thanks, for the eyes of the Duchess were full of unshed tears as she said, "Thank you, Helvetia Murray."

She told the Duke she had seldom cared so much for the airs of Scotland, and Helvetia had another triumph.

She had learned a beautiful arrangement of airs, intending some time to please the Duchess.

"You play so well, Miss Murray," she said, "and have an excellent memory."

"We remember what we like very much," Helvetia said; "and your Grace knows I like Scotland, and have visited its beauties, and I found that I had fitted all Sir Walter Scott's novels to the right places."

"It is not usual."

"No; one generally fits romances to the wrong castles."

"And you are fond of yachting, you told us?"

"Very. I am fitted for it constitutionally, so it is a real pleasure to me."

Lord Grousland determined to have a yacht kept for Helvetia's use if he could only induce her to become his wife; and he decided whilst she was busily telling about her yachting experiences, and he heard Mr. Ashbury's *Livonia* described, that his yacht should outdo all others, and he would have her built on the newest principles, and in honour of the Duchess, she should be christened the *Sybil*.





CHAPTER XXV.

THE next morning Helvetia did not appear at breakfast, but people staying at Aldborough were very independent in their habits, and took that meal when and where they chose.

The Duchess was unable to come in for luncheon, and Lady May presided, and had all the guests upon her hands; the laceworking Irish Countess, she told herself, was the least difficult to amuse of the whole party.

A partial thaw prevented any one going out, and billiards were not popular with all, so it was late in the afternoon before May could steal away to the boudoir, where she expected to find Helvetia deep in a new book. •

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She knocked at her chamber door, to inquire lest her health failed, but Mrs. Cave's waiting-woman appeared, and said—

"Miss Murray thanks Lady May for her kind visit, but Miss Murray is never sick, and hopes to appear to-morrow. She cannot do so to-day, having letters of importance from America to answer."

The General announced that he and Mrs. Cave were summoned: and a gloom came. over May, during the short interval when the Duchess received her guests before dinner.

Almost the last came Helvetia, in faultless and matchless toilette, gliding past, leaning on the arm of Mr. Sinclair.

Her eyes were bright, but too bright, and tears had flowed and left their traces though rouge or something had been applied, and a skilful coiffure hid more than usual.

She smiled on May, but did not make it appear to any one that they had not met before; and May, sensible and collected as ever, let her smile answer.

Lord Grousland looked dark, and said some bitter things at dinner, that showed life was a little distasteful to him; but Mrs. Sinclair and her husband and the fourteen other people present that day, noticed nothing in particular.

Some professionals performed fine music in the evening.

Again the Duchess was a little faint, and May attended her, and waited till it was late, before she could retire, and by that time Helvetia Murray had gone to bed.

A new attack of bronchitis was expected, and unluckily it came.

Helvetia had scarcely spoken to Lord Grousland all that evening, but had talked to Mr. Sinclair, who took her in to dinner, and in the intervals of the musical programme had, being near her, claimed attention. There were beautiful water-colours, in books of exquisite binding, and finer photographs than are usually seen, lying on small tables, for the amusement of any one who chose to turn them over.

Lord Grousland conscientiously looked at them every one. Even Lady May did not join him, and Helvetia appeared to forget his existence, and moreover to allow Mr. Sinclair to be as polite as he chose.

When all was over, and the musicians were moving away, he restlessly found his coat and determined to sleep, not at the Castle, but at the hotel at Aldborough, and to walk there in the half-melting snow.

His servant was told to follow him, and lighting a cigar, he went forth into the night, angry and jealous; for two women he believed had that evening, ill-treated or neglected him.

The little dog Tatters followed him, in

high delight at being taken into the park at that unusual hour.

Lord Grousland drew forth a small revolver which he carried, and relieved his feelings by shooting poor Tatters. No one heard the shot, and the little dog lay where he fell, at a short distance from the carriage road, on the soft snow.

The body was found in the morning, and buried. The stableman, whose charge he was, blamed the gamekeepers, but Tatters was forgotten in an hour or two.

May suspected how he came by his death, but she was too full of sorrow to grieve for him.

Helvetia had called him her dog, and the great Scotch soldier had shot the poor little terrier.

The secret was a small one, but she kept it.

That morning Helvetia had come to

May's room, but it was empty, for her friend was with the Duchess and her doctor.

After breakfast May was entertaining the Irish Countess and the other guests, when Miss Murray came dressed for travelling.

"Helvetia! what does this mean?"

"It means that we must say good-bye."

May followed her to the ante-room, and to the deep mullioned window, where Helvetia said—

"You will follow us when the Duchess is better? We have to cross to-morrow; the General is wanted in Paris, but, May, my heart is—not to be mended. May I claim your friendship for my 'doggie?""

"You wish to leave him here?"

"For the present, yes."

Helvetia's lips trembled; a tear fell. She was truly fond of May, and she threw her arms about her.

"I have been so happy with you. When the Duchess is better, you will come to us. Mrs. Cave is so sorry to leave." "She could go with her General to Paris, but you need not go at all, Helvetia."

"Do not say that; my poor heart is all in tatters now;" she smiled as she thought of the dog's name. "There is a mystery too deep for Lady May Givendale-----"

The Duke was heard leading Mrs. Cave across the entrance hall, and saying—

"I have heard of your decision with much sorrow."

"We can never thank you enough for your hospitality," said the General, and Mrs. Cave and Helvetia were in tears as they left Aldborough Castle.

May looked for Tatters, and recollected he had not come to bid his mistress farewell. Shortly after he was discovered cold and dead in the snow.





CHAPTER XXVI.

FASHIONABLE life, or any actual life, has much of tameness when described; the details of every day become monotonous. Ceremonies are as wearisome in recital as in action.

The Duchess kept to her room, the Duke had a political meeting to attend, and must be absent for a night or two, so Lady May was on duty at all hours.

Helvetia appeared to be forgotten as much as Ernest St. Auburn, by all but herself. The plan of travelling together to Italy had been pleasant to speak of, and like many agreeable prospects had not been carried out.

"Shall I ever see Helvetia again ?" came

to be a question, but there was not much time for mysteries or uncertainties.

Lord Grousland dined at the Castle once after Helvetia left, and standing over the table with, this time, Lady May, turning over the pages of a book of rare engravings, he heard all she could tell him; and she told him in such manner as to remove his jealous fear of Mr. Sinclair. So May knew how to give comfort, though she could receive none.

"Oh! Ernest! Ernest!" came the wail at last. "Where are you? and where is the answer to my letter? Why are we to be separated? I am pained and lonely, more so since Helvetia too is gone: and I cannot relieve my feelings by shooting Tatters! Poor little beast! He was very affectionate, and it was too bad of Lord Grousland. Yet, I almost admire him for it too!"

All the time of Helvetia's visit no news 16-2

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from Ernest had come. May wept not, but she wondered much.

Lady Tarbetson did not write to any one; her grief was very great, and as the child had been buried without her seeing him, it trebled the agony, and as Lord Tarbetson had to return to Ireland, he took his wife with him, but the grief seemed to return there with remorse, and she grew seriously ill.

A complete inspection of the house in London was instituted, for either infection remained from the poor child, or the cause of his virulent fever still existed. A cook and a nurserymaid had taken the complaint, and only Sisters of Mercy had come near them, till every pipe and drain had been removed, and a general refitting and papering had restored confidence.

Lady Tarbetson wrote to ask May to join her at Brussels, whither she settled, passing quickly viâ Ostend to Belgium.

May did not like to leave the Duchess,

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but Lady Tarbetson's letter brought again a bad night, with a revival of sad dreams about Ernest, and Colonel Hibson, and the O'Grady.

The frost broke, and riding came to be resumed. Lady Gwendoline D'Ayr was on a visit, and she sat with the lace-making lady, who still remained; so May took her favourite exercise.

"My dear," the Duke said, as she was dismounting one day, and he had driven up just in time to be of service, "I have scarcely seen you, except in public, for weeks; come and tell me how you are getting on."

Her heart beat; she suspected he had some information to give of Ernest.

The Duke opened the library door, and stirred the fire, putting on some pieces of wood which were placed ready, to make an agreeable blaze; then he drew a heavy leather-covered chair for May, and another for himself near to it, and began to warm his hands very comfortably.

May sat down in her splashed habit, laid down her little whip, and put up her veil, high up on her hat to leave her face quite free.

"Your hands are cold too," said the Duke, seeing them as she removed her gloves; "let us have some hot soup in here, together."

"Thank you; it would be very nice."

He rang the bell, and ordered it to be brought immediately.

He seemed to enjoy the servant's look of surprise, and smilingly noticed it to May, who was glad to see him free from care for a short time.

He had been so busy lately, and the illness of the Duchess had rendered him very lonely; so May felt that the accidental meeting with her at the entrancehall door, must have been pleasant, since he had a moment to spare for comfort.

"Perhaps, my dear," he said, "you are tired, and would rather not stay now? Your habit too—is it damp?"

"Not damp, only dirty; never mind it. If you can have me, I am only too proud to stay. We had no rain, but the frost is gone, and the roads are, of course, very muddy."

"Yes; they will have good hunting at Boxall."

"That is Mr. Sinclair's ?"

"Yes; you do not go there, May?"

"No; I like my usual ride better. It is nice and warm here—I am so glad you had time to ask me."

"That is it, my dear-never want of inclination, only want of time. Sybil is so patient, and understands me."

"The weather is too cold for her yet."

"Yes, very cold; the black frosts are not over, and they are only worse than the white ones. Do you mind winter much, May ?"

"Not for myself," she replied.

May had hoped to go with Helvetia, and it came to her for the first time that the Duke did not wish it, and that as he sat by the library fire, he would not like her to go; and she had spoken, not with the bounding joy of youth, anxious to go, as on former occasions, for her own pleasure.

"Here comes the soup;" and the Duke busied himself to place a little table, on which to put her plate with his own hands, directing the man meanwhile, and seeming quite happy over this novel mode of luncheon.

With each spoonful of soup he grew warmer, and seemed more pleased, and spoke of the Duchess and of his vast engagements, and then he rang and sent the plates away, and said—

"My dear, there is dismal news of the inundations in India—a little talk of insurrection too, though the Looshais are quieted. Calcutta news is not cheerful. The roads are swamps, the rivers full, after the unusual rainfall, and the travelling next to impossible—at any rate, for ladies; the wet does not agree with the railways. It is well you gave up your trip—what do your letters say ?"

With suspended breath May had listened. She had heard him speak of India, expecting news of Ernest; but she had to answer his question now, so she gathered herself up and replied—

"I have no letters; none since I wrote to say that I would go."

"Have you written again ?"

" No."

"You are quite right there. Have you given him up?"

"No; I trust him."

Her quiet dignity pleased the Duke.

"If you had gone by the mail we spoke of, you could not have reached him." (The Duke wanted to give her comfort.) "The ladies who went up the country this season, owing to the unprecedented rains, suffered much and returned, for their luggage could not go. Men had to leave the ladies at Calcutta, and St. Auburn may wait for months, without seeing those who went out with him; it is well you did not go, my dear, for he might not have been able to meet you at that Cathedral we talked about."

"He may not have had my letter."

"Had you been free, May, I could have at once proposed one who is worthy of you, and would be my choice for you, if you could tell me you had given up this Ernest; but we will wait a little—it is useless to press the affair upon you. You have made up your mind, I think, to travel with your American friend ?"

"I had until to-day."

"And to-day your intention is ——?" "Not so strong."

"I am glad of it, my dear. I do not like to tie you, but I could not bear the house without you. Sybil is not to go yet from here, and Gwendoline D'Ayr would be a poor substitute for you."

"I decide now, and am proud that you think me useful."

"Then I may tell Sybil that you are not going ?"

"Certainly; does she wish me to remain ?"

"Of course she does, my dear. We are only fearful of curtailing your enjoyments."

"Pray tell her that I am so happy not to I thought the Duchess wished to go g0. to Florence or Rome, and I was unhappy and unsatisfied with Ernest, and let Helvetia arrange for me. As I could not go to India, it seemed not to matter where I went."

"It matters to us, my dear, and to another, who is very impatient to be reintroduced."

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May rose. The Duke admired her selfcontrol; she betrayed no annoyance.

"Yes, go," he said, "and take off that damp habit, or you will be good neither for St. Auburn or another man."

The Duke was growing playful, and he opened the door for her with a joyful air, and ascended the wide staircase with her, and left her at her own door, whilst he went to assure the Duchess that May would remain to "fend off" Gwendoline, and the good man knew that he had done May more good than she would acknowledge, by raising curiosity as to that reintroduction which was in store for her.





CHAPTER XXVII.

THE day's *Times* and her letters were come, and still in her draggled habit, May began to look them over. It was a regular early spring day; a keen wind had subsided, and a very bright sun streamed over the park, making everywhere light, in the absence of foliage.

Running her eye over the list of births in *The Times*, she came to the name of Lady Tarbetson :—" 'A son, at Brussels.' I am so glad, it will help to console them for the loss of little Tom."

The marriages contained no names that day which interested her, but amongst the deaths was one which caught her breath, and she sank into a chair as she read :— "Ellinor Beatrice, only daughter of the late Edmond Ernest St. Auburn, aged 19."

A mist came over her eyes.

"Ernest's sister! for whom I intended to do so much! It was one of my dreams to introduce her, and to be instrumental in settling her happily in life. I became quite a match-maker in my heart for her sake. Poor Ellinor! this is a terrible sorrow. She was well and strong when Ernest left, not a year ago—a year! but little more than half a year; but it has been so long, so very long, and his sister has found it long enough to suffer—and to die! The poor mother! if I could let her know, my sympathy is very sincere and heartfelt; but as things are, she might resent it."

May had a fit of weeping over the death of the sister whom she had meant to love so tenderly.

There was much chiding on the part of



Pauline, who declared she had knocked again and again at the door, and had found the room empty, and having made sure over and over again that the horses had returned, she came and found her lady still in the riding-dress, which ought to have been removed long ago, &c. &c. &c.

Mrs. St. Auburn was too just a woman to lay all her troubles directly on Lady May Givendale; but she could not help blaming her for the absence of Ernest, which the doting mother felt most cruelly.

Ellinor's was a weaker nature, and she had cherished her poor child and brought her back to London for good medical aid, though she could not give her southern breezes, for she had not the means, nor could she inspire her with the hopes which buoyed her own spirit that time would rectify all things.

Ellinor died of rapid consumption: it could not be arrested, for she had loved and

been disappointed, and made no effort, had no patience, no reliance on the future, and no strength to throw off the disease.

To her it appeared that Ernest was cold and cruel; he had gone away and did not write; and Mr. Farndale, whose visits ceased with Ernest, had seemed to care for her, but had forgotten her existence; and the beautiful Lady May, of whom Ellinor used to hear, had passed from her also, and was probably enjoying the winter in some soft climate, without cold draughts or bitter cutting wind, and the poor girl despaired. Unhappiness ate into her weak system, and death soon ended the blighted life.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

I was too late to help the sister of Ernest, and May wished that night that she had gone to Calcutta at all risks, till the Duke's account of the ladies left there made a little break in her desire.

"Too late " seemed the fatal knell which sounded in all her musings, and she tried to sleep off her unhappiness, and determined to have another interview with the Duke in the morning. Then came the Dublin lady and the question, could Ernest have deserted her ?

Night followed night, and she looked ill with want of refreshing sleep.

Lady Gwendoline said it was the cold, and the Duchess's maid came to her with a swansdown petticoat, and an eiderdown quilt. May could not find consolation even at church, for her sorrow was uncertainty; and it seemed difficult to her to pray about one whom she felt to be her absent lover—but if he were really the husband of another, had she the right to think of him as such ?

May felt as if she could have borne anything but that ! she could have led the life of a devotee, and have confined her thoughts for the whole two years to prayer for Ernest—but for that little woman in Dublin, whom nevertheless she did not believe to be his wife.

It was a sore strait, and too humiliating to lay before the Duke. How could she confess her dread that Captain St. Auburn had a wife, after she had said she trusted him? Or the strong-minded Duke would have made short work of her uncertainties, by instituting inquiries at once.

May shrank from the very shadow of a doubt upon her soldier.

The Duke saw his niece at dinner and he attended one or two balls with her, and his anxiety about the Duchess was mitigated, and all went on as usual.

Lady Gwendoline would have rated her if possible about being lovesick and heartbroken, but May kept her own counsel with true dignity.

She could pray for patience, and she did so, though patience meant waiting for two long years. Heavenly discipline was leading her to conquer grief, and to submit.

Not shut from the world and its duties, but to give her will cheerfully to any circumstances she learned to see; women are not to choose their paths, but are to follow those which are made clear to them, sometimes by much tribulation.

Without submission, at this period, Lady Gwendoline D'Ayr would have been a very trying person to Lady May; there was a never-ceasing attempt to usurp her place in the household. May, with beautiful 17-2

humility, prevented unpleasantness with the servants, by her deferential manner to the visitor. "When Lady Gwendoline D'Ayr is here," she would say to them in a manner which earned their respect, and kept the peace.

For some reason best known to herself, Lady Gwendoline seemed bent upon driving May to distraction; she harped upon Rome or Florence daily, expressing herself most anxious to go there, but bringing forward countless unmeaning reasons why she could not.

After calling the attention of every one to the politics of Italy, or her own opinions, she would say loudly—

"Lady May, I heard you were to go to Italy for this spring."

May smilingly answered, always the same—"I did think of it, some time ago, but General and Mrs. Cave and Miss Murray, have remained in Paris."

After hearty abuse of the Pope, and some

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equally unpolite remarks about the King, and Rome, Lady Gwendoline one day attacked America, and displayed her ignorance and prejudices boldly, with a mock appeal to May, because she had so many American friends.

She failed to hurt anybody's feelings. The Duke permitted her to vent her little spite, but always came to the rescue in time to save Lady May; so she might exhaust herself if she chose, but his favourite, and Helvetia Murray, were always shielded by him, without yielding his own placidity or permitting the calm of May Givendale to be ruffled.

The friends whom General Cave wished to see, awaited him in Paris, whence Helvetia wrote, saying that no one seemed inclined to move.

"Perhaps," she added, gaily, "just before the London season begins, we may meet. You may come to Paris, or we may return to England, for the General transacts so

much business here, there could be nothing left for him to do at Washington."

The American girl's friendship and affection were welcome to May.

"Everything this year goes differently from what we planned," she said. "Helvetia is still in Paris, and she appears to have no new interests, and I suppose she cannot know of the loss of the *Euphorbia*."





CHAPTER XXIX.

YOUR reticence is quite incomprehensible, May," Lady Gwendoline said, as she and the party of ladies were settled in the saloon for the morning. The lace-working Countess was gone, and Mrs. Sinclair—the latter to see about her outfit; but a pair of young ladies had to be entertained, whose mother was a friend of the Duchess, and two or three matrons, whose husbands had joined the hunt that day.

Lady Gwendoline had a long face, with a fair complexion, inclined to freckle, which, if you could forget, she did not give you leave.

She could not ride, objected to drive, and was never glad to do anything, having for excuse the eternal "My freckles might come out."

Her ruddy shade of hair, she insinuated, was due to art, and her "peculiar fancy for that particular shade, so very difficult to obtain;" in fact, she was of the order of "immense bore."

Her attempts at matrimony had been frequent, and numerous escapes had the poor men, according to her account, for she was at the age and in the condition of the woman in Mrs. Gaskell's story, who prayed for "any, good Lord, any,"—but no husband had appeared; and Lady Gwendoline managed to make herself ridiculous, both by her attempts to ensnare the unwary, and by her repeated efforts to prove that her red hair was the effect of skilful art.

People fancied when she said so much about it, that she had failed to render it less brilliant and deep in its colour.

"Your reticence is unequalled, you never speak of any man at all," she said to Lady May. "One might think you had been brought up in a nunnery, and never thought about matrimony. You never tell us of an offer, or what your partners say."

"Tell us about your own," said a goodnatured lady, anxious to free May from persecution.

Gwendoline was not shy about the open compliments which men paid to her expectant face. She always looked for a set speech, and it would have been a pity to disappoint her.

Her boasts were shallow, her compliments were asked for, but Lady Gwendoline liked them, and the ingenuity with which all subjects were turned to the colour of her own hair, could not fail to entertain.

A lady is a little startled by the question, "Whose dye do you use ?"

The truth came generally, "Not any."

"Ah! you are afraid? Well, dark dyes may be dangerous, but not all; I assure you I have to lavish quarts upon my hair. I saw a lady at the Guards' ball with hair almost scarlet, and I said I will never rest till mine is like that, and I am sure the Titiens' tinge is quite easy to obtain ; hair of my colour is much admired in Italy. Lady May, do not fail to look at that Perugino in the Uffizi, and send me word if I ought to darken mine," and then she bade May look at other portraits.

"I will," said May, "when I go; but if it is of importance do not wait, for I may not go this year."

"Oh, really how tiresome ! when people have expressed an intention to do a thing, they ought to do it, for the sake of other people; I told the Archdeacon so this morning."

"Why do you not marry the Archdeacon?" said one of the young ladies, anxious to set Lady Gwendoline upon matrimonial adventures again.

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"Well, I never thought of it : is he not rather old ?"

"That is for you to judge."

"And think," said another, "of his Christian names—Alphonsus Edward."

"I will ask him if he likes reddish hair; and will take bets if you like as to his reply. He uses adjectives; I should be his 'ruby Gwendoline,' as he uses the 'gentle dove,' or the 'mischievous hawk,' or the 'noble pheasant.'"

"Does he shoot ?"

"I fancy not, but he carries a gun; it would be 'sinful murder,' or 'sad slaughter,' to kill the 'startled game.' May, who was that handsome young fellow who tumbled off his hat to you in the park ?"

"A second cousin, Tom Saville."

"I think I will marry him."

One of the young ladies blushed, and it was evident she did not intend to give her share of the handsome Tom Saville to Lady Gwendoline. " Eva, what do you blush for?" she asked; " tell me who the tall man is who followed."

"Major Combermere," said Eva; "he is engaged to Maude."

Both sisters blushed, but seemed to enjoy teazing Lady Gwendoline, who said---

"I did not catch that tall man's name, but he danced three times with me last night, and said mine was the brightest head, and the fairest complexion in the room; so I told him I knew every secret about the hair, even to the composition of brilliantine, and that delightful stuff that gentlemen scent their whiskers with."

"That was unkind," said Eva, "for Major Combermere has no whiskers."

"Because he shaves them off," said Maude.

"I do not like a shaved man it; makes him look like a lunatic."

"Oh! Lady Gwendoline! Yet you danced three times with a shaved man, and the Archdeacon shaves."

"I have not decided to marry him, or I should make him wear a beautiful beard!"

"When you marry send cards and cake."

Then Lady Gwendoline grew cross; this "when you marry," from two young girls, both engaged, displeased her even more than the careless way, in which the roomful of ladies listened to her assertions of the assistance of dyes, to produce the natural tinge of her red and vain head.

It being misty and grey without, she asked May to walk with her to Aldborough, and on the way, observed-

"I do not like those Miss Granvilles at all; why do you have them here ?"

"The Duchess asks whom she pleases."

" But you-do you ask no one?"

"I have no one but the Duchess's friends."

"Except Americans?"

"Yes, I have one American friend, Miss Murray."

"I thought you went in for America at a great rate. I expected to see a Yankee or two about you. Some two or three who had lost members in the war, or had run for the elections! The President himself would not have surprised me."

May walked on in silence.

"But you had officers. What has become of them? Where is Lord Grousland?"

" I do not know."

"Do not know? Why, I heard he was engaged to you? You must know where Lord Grousland is !" ē

"You can ask the Duke."

"You are too provoking, May. I should not try to take Lord Grousland from you; but I do wonder you do not go to Italy with Miss Murray."

"She is still in Paris with Mrs. Cave."

Then Lady Gwendoline began to give an account of her lovers, speaking in the same tone as she would have described her partners at a ball.

A day or two after, May was prepared for her ride, and found the Duke intended to be her escort. The weather was clear and pleasant. The noble Duke with his fine grey head, rode his well-bred horse, and Lady May riding her favourite beside him.

It was a wealthy English scene, rich country, game in plenty, beautiful undulating meadows and magnificent woods in the distance; now and then a pheasant made a bright spot in front of a hedge, and disappeared into the coppice, or a rabbit or hare vanished over the dead leaves.

May was used to country sights and country sounds, and her thoughts wandered to a pretty place in an adjacent county, which she had meant to buy for Ernest, when rest should come, and he had time to enjoy some shooting or hunting.

The full tide of sorrow swept over her as she rode along by the Duke that day. The bitter disappointment of her life made her question why had that overwhelming wave come over her that day; the recollec-

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tion of Ernest's mother came to soothe her, but it was hard to see a spot to rest her future upon.

The struggle not to betray to the Duke any sad remembrances was successful, and he told her some anecdotes of people she had known, and said he had met Lord Tarbetson in London the day before, whose wife and son were still at Brussels.

"And now, my dear," he said, as they turned their horses homewards, "the Duchess has a little scheme for you, and Gwendoline is to be disposed of."

"Married ?"

"No; the Duchess is not a good matchmaker, but the Granvilles are going to have a set of balls; the first next week, and she is to go with them, and having said so much about Florence with a view to get you to go there, Mrs. Saville has taken it into her head to go, and Gwendoline is to go likewise to Italy with her."

May recollected Lady Gwendoline's lately expressed dislike of Maude and Eva

Granville, at whose weddings she was nevertheless to show her radiant head, and the quiet dealings of the Duchess, were some amusement to May.

"And what is the scheme for me?"

"To see your friend Miss Murray in Paris, and then to go with Sybil to Nice."

"Yes, that will be pleasant; but I hope you are not uneasy about her now?"

"No, not uneasy, but she requires rest. Gwendoline fancies herself useful, but is quite ready to go in spite of it, to the first ball."

"She is very fond of balls."

"Very; we refused for you, my dear."

"Oh! thank you so very much."

"Sybil said (and you know her placid manner, which carries conviction with it) that you were anxious to go with her, and I think, my dear, you are a little tired."

"Perhaps so-ennuyée ?"

"Yes, I think that too, but you are very good. At any rate, Sybil cannot get rest here; she must get away from the influx of people, so we shall shut up Aldborough, and so give her repose."

May was silent. Other years she had been so anxious to choose where to go. She was now indifferent. The Duke asked—

"Do you object to leave, my dear ?"

"Oh, no-anything you prefer."

"I am foolish enough to wish to go with my wife, and to wish also to go further South than our Devon place, near Torquay, for my work would follow me there; so we think of Nice for the present, and should it get too hot, we can move. You gave up your will some time ago to please me, and I hope the future will yet please you, May."

She could say nothing. He continued-

"I had a letter from Lord Grousland to-day; he is piqued. Do you think it is at your refusal of him?"

"I think not; he seemed to understand that I could not accept him, but I did hope, Helvetia-----"

"Ah!" said the Duke, who saw some

one had arrived. "Ah! May, if I could have my wish——" he began. But the grooms were waiting to take the horses, and the Duke went to welcome the newly arrived gentleman.

May gathered her whip and skirt, and was passing quickly through the hall, but the Duke said—

"May, my dear, do you remember? an old friend."

The gentleman bowed stiffly. May yet more so, for his face seemed to freeze her. Something recalled Ernest with very unpleasant feelings — she was puzzled for why, and where ? Why she felt wretched ? Where she had seen him ?

The Duke saw she did not mean to wait; for as she bowed, she disappeared, and hurried to her room.

Pauline thought she had ridden too far for her strength. Gwendoline tortured her at dinner with recommendations and remedies, glad to have attention called to

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her pale face; but Lady May did not seem to have any feelings that could be harrowed by Lady Gwendoline D'Ayr, who was to leave the next morning to make ready for her new conquests.

May's sufferings came at night, with ever recurring dreams of Ernest; but in sleep she could not reason, and she could be madly jealous, for the gentleman whom she had passed in the hall after her ride, and for whom she had looked down the dinner table in vain, now haunted her. She awoke, or shook off her vision-told herself he was some one who had paid his respects to the Duke, and had left the Castle immediately for London, or York, or anywhere; she could not get over the misery his face recalled, for it brought Mrs. Ernest St. Auburn, who would come with him in her dreams, to tell strange things, and startle her, till she was obliged to light her lamp, and take a book to divert her mind by solid reading.



CHAPTER XXX.

 ${\rm A}^{\rm T}$ breakfast Gwendoline was too full of talk to notice any one.

The table was full, and every one was busy with letters and the duties and pleasures of the present, or in prospect.

It was soon known that the Duchess intended to go to Nice, and the guests made arrangements to leave in twos and threes.

After Gwendoline's departure, things were very smooth, and a week passed, and wonderful quiet reigned at Aldborough Castle.

There were two specially quaint little apartments on the floor which the Duchess used, called "My Lady's Chambers," and as the party was reduced to so small a number, these were prepared for the drawing, and dining-rooms, till the move to Nice should be arranged.

These lovely chambers opened into one another, and were decorated in a very peculiar and charming manner, after a style used by Catherine de Medicis.

May entered the one prepared for a sitting-room, on her way to her boudoir and to dress for dinner, and saw that the dinner-table in the adjoining one was served for four persons.

Both were lighted when she returned, and she sat for a little time alone, but reading, forming a beautiful picture in the midst of "My Lady's Chambers."

Some minutes elapsed, when there entered the gentleman of whom she had dreamed, whom the Duke had called an old friend, and she had passed so stiffly in the hall a week before.

He bowed ceremoniously--so did May;



but he advanced, and offered a large bunch of white violets, as he said-

"You do not remember me-but-"

May coloured crimson, but she took the flowers.

"I remember now," she said, with a sob in her voice; "you were Colonel Hibson's friend, in Dublin."

"Colonel Hibson's friend !" he repeated, and sat down as if she had stabled him to the heart.

It was not a pleasing recollection to May, and the crimson stain remained on her face.

The gentleman made no attempt to break the silence further, but he found some sort of pleasure in observing that May still held the violets in her hand.

The Duchess came in, leaning on her husband.

"Dinner," said the Duke. "Why, May, you two look like strangers to each other."

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"Strangers? I have not the pleasure----"

"Have you forgotten Lord Learnington, May?" said the Duchess. "Well, it is very funny indeed; he told me he thought you had, but really I could not believe it."

Lord Learnington advanced. He did not seem pleased, for May had wounded him, but she offered her hand, and he took it, and she blushed painfully—so much, that the Duke, who did not know about the meeting in Dublin, was a little troubled to account for it.

For his part, Lord Learnington half repented that he had come to Aldborough again; but after the affair of the fan in Ireland, he had come to wish that his betrothal had never been broken off, for he had never seen any one who had touched his heart as Lady May did, then and there.

Military duties had kept him away from England, but he determined to see her once more, and ascertain if he had any chance. Once, then, he was at Aldborough, and his name not being heard by May, he had the mortification to find, he was not even observed to be present.

He saw Lord Grousland, and believed that he was to be the happy man; but faint heart never won fair lady," so he contrived to visit the Duchess, with an air of concern for her health, before she went to Nice.

Here he was dining *en famille*—just what he had sighed for; but May gave evidence of anything but pleasure in his society.

She thought the Duke was not as usual; he seemed preoccupied, and did not appear to have his usual power of conversation.

The Duchess, looking the worse for her confinement to her room, was yet the only gay one of the party.

"It is very nice, this little room, but I think you all seem strange in it; you must remember how nice it is for me to have no stairs. I do think I will have my harp brought in."

The harp was brought and tuned, and the Duchess enjoyed her music; and the Duke looked at his evening budget of letters, for he made no stranger of Lord Learnington.

May led him to speak of Ireland, drew him by a few questions back to the time she was there with Lady Tarbetson, and finally, made a strong resolve, and conquering her dislike with an effort which she blessed all the rest of her life, said—

"Did you ever see the Mrs. O'Grady again, who had my fan ?"

"Never; she went to Cork with the regiment she most admired."

"And her daughter ?"

"You mean did Hibson marry her? After he found how he had been humbugged into a flirtation—not he. They tried very hard for him, but he got off safely, and we all had to congratulate him. After they went from the Portobello barracks, the O'Grady went to Cork, and the little lady may call herself by any other name—or Mrs. Hibson, if she likes ! only it is not a pretty one, and the O'Grady used to boast that she always chose the prettiest name in the Army List for——"

May was gone.

Before Lord Learnington had finished his explanation she had left the room; she was gone to throw herself meekly and humbly on her knees and to cry out aloud—

"Oh! God, I thank thee."

Then rising after a few moments of prayer which was thanksgiving and strength at once, she returned and found the Duke buried behind his evening paper, and Lord Learnington sitting on the sofa by the Duchess, and speaking to her in a quiet familiar tone, and she was listening to him with a satisfied smile. If Lord Learnington observed May's return, he made no sign, but continued his low-voiced conversation on the sofa.

Very likely he had reproached himself for having bored her with too long details of Colonel Hibson and the little "grass widow," and had determined to select his topics of conversation for the future, and not to wait for May to question him. How could he know of the comfort and satisfaction his explanation of Colonel Hibson's unfortunate affair had been to her? or how much his own presence had made her suffer, because he had reminded her of it?

He was very attentive to the Duchess, and very determined to impress her in his favour, for as yet May had given him no encouragement, and he wanted to have a staunch ally should one be needed.

The Duchess retired early, and Lord Learnington shook hands with the Duke, and bowed to May, though in a far less formal manner, immediately after.

His host left the room with him, and after some minutes, came back, having a large soft Indian shawl across his arm.

May was standing looking into the fire.

"Put this on your shoulders, my dear," he said. "I want to talk to you. Shall it be here, or in the library ?"

May trembled a little for some unknown fear, but conquering, replied-

"Not here. I should prefer your fire May we go and sit there, as we below. did the day we had the soup together ?"

"Yes, I thought you would like that; so I have made preparations, and have some coffee there now-at least it is ordered."

They repaired to the library, and the two great square green leather-covered chairs were again drawn close together, near the fire.

Coffee was there, and the Duke took a cup, and May could see him break some thin, crisp, rusk or toast, and she could hear the sound, but it felt as if at a distance and through the psalms of thanksgiving, which ran in her head.

"Will you not drink some coffee, my dear?"

He handed a cup, which she took, but very soon set down untouched.

"You do not care for coffee at night? Well, let us ring then, and send away the tray, and the man to bed."

So the considerate master of the household, insured a quiet hour for May.

"Draw that shawl round you, my dear. I brought it from Sybil's room for you."

"You are always so good to me," she said, determined to fear nothing, and to recover her powers of speech.

"I cannot always tell you exactly what I should like to tell, for I cannot alter the decrees of Providence," he began.

"Ernest St. Auburn left you with me, so he gave me his trust and confidence in a manner which is more sacred than words, and I understand all his motives, as well as I clearly saw all your intentions.

"It is well, my dear, you did not follow him. I thank God you are still under my roof.

"Until to-day I have sought in vain for details and particulars of his movemente.

"Things were very badly managed, and it is sad to recall sufferings, though they may be over.

"Orders appear to have been given, and countermanded; but we have lost a mail or two, so nothing can be rectified or even explained fully. The expedition started northwards of Calcutta, then we heard a move to Rangoon was contemplated and afterwards negatived.

"Ernest did not come back to Calcutta. The rains cut off communication, and the little insurrection frightened people; so, lest exaggerated accounts should spread terror, since some sickness prevailed, no news at all seems to have come home. 288

"May! can you bear it? Your Ernest appears to have undertaken work from which others shrunk, and overcome some difficulties which had daunted seasoned men; but he did not return-his name will never again be on an earthly muster-roll. Lean on me, dear May; it is sad for me to tell, and is also a strange story of mismanagement. His death does not appear to have been certified till a long time after it occurred, for he died in some lonely bungalow-left there, I fear, with others stricken with fever on the line of march. Most men get a sort of acclimatizing fever, as you know, on first trial of the climate, but it cut off your tired soldier, May.

"I feel indignant that we know so little and can do nothing. I scarcely see what use inquiry or disturbance could be now. Most likely his death would be sudden, possibly with many comforts and good surgical skill; it was, I find, a sort similar to jungle fever, so that is ascertained, and

that he was not killed in the little engagement.

"May, you are very quiet, my dear. I would rather see you weep—tears would relieve the full heart. It is better for me to tell you; to-morrow it might be in the papers—for Indian news, once come, goes round like wildfire! So I tell you this myself."

"Oh yes," she said, with a dry sob and a very husky voice. "You are so good. His poor mother! I feel for her too—oh, it is so sad for her!"

"For her, my dear, but for you ?"

May got up for a moment, then sat down, and rocked for an instant, as if weakness might overcome her.

The Duke let the terrible crisis in her life pass. Her white face was not relieved by tears, but he knew that both on her own account, and with her beautiful sympathy for Ernest's mother, May's grief was deeply seated. She loved with all her

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heart; she sorrowed for Ernest's widowed mother in some sort as for herself, but she surprised the Duke by coming closer to him and saying in a determined voice, though not louder than a whisper—

"I can bear it."

"Thank God," he said, reverently. After some moments had elapsed, and he had watched the pale face till he feared she was about to faint.

"I can bear it," she said, clinging to the Duke, "because he was good and noble, and worth all my love, and all your respect."

"I never doubted that, my poor May."

"You are so much more excellent than I, who till this evening have felt at intervals a little shadow as of doubt come over me—a shadow that fell upon my reason, a weak temptation to torment and torture me by questioning why he went to India; but as I have confessed this to your Grace, thank Heaven with me that my little shadow, my slender gossamer of doubt, was cleared away to-night, by a few words from Lord Learnington."

"Learnington never knew about him, and never met or heard of him."

"He was nevertheless the happy means, without suspecting it, of making the memory of Ernest perfect, without one shadow of a spot to dim its lustre."

"My dear, this will comfort you."

"It does comfort me, and makes me strong to bear the blow. It will be a source of grateful consolation all my life that I was sure of this, before I listened to your sad information to-night."

"And it was Learnington who cleared him ?"

"Yes. Yet that is too strong a term, for there never was an accusation."

"May, you are brave and just, and your strong sense pleases me: even in this hour of sorrow, my dear, let me beg of you to hear me. Lord Learnington has come

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forward, having, he tells me, met you and determined to win you, but you did not seem to permit any sort of advances.

"I am growing old, May, and I shall plead that you give me my deserts, for I love you tenderly as my own child. Let me give hope to Learnington, and indeed he loves you as you deserve to be loved, and not on account of the old betrothal, but because you are his choice among thousands.

"With Ernest living, I could not help him, but, dear child, I have many reasons for seeing that once married to Lord Learnington, happiness will follow. Let him plead his own cause, I plead mine."

The Duke, late as it was, gave her several of his most potent reasons for desiring this alliance on his own account, and when he had finished, though no colour had come to her lips or cheeks, she who could never be ungenerous, kissed the Duke's hand and said, bowing her head and kneeling submissively---



"As you please. God guide me in the new path, as he sustained me in the old; henceforth I will make no plans or intentions, but lean on you, dear Duke, and obey your wishes, trying to do His will, as I shall look to Him for strength."

The dear old man raised her, himself in tears, and led her to Pauline, with some few words to that functionary that gave her to understand that rest only, and no questioning, would be acceptable; and early the next day Pauline had declared to the whole company in the housekeeper's room, that she was sure Lady May's boxesful of beautiful things would be put into use before long, for her lady had been kept by the Duke for hours after every one else had retired; for people of quality in high life had so much to sign, so many papers to arrange for having their rents properly paid, that Lady May had come to her room last night, over-fatigued and as white as death; and they would all see if she

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were a true prophetess, and whether a handsome *milord's* patience would not be very soon rewarded.

For two or three days Lady May did not leave her bed, but on the following Sunday she appeared, and the Duchess told her she looked as if she had just risen from a fever, she was looking so changed and worn.

Nothing was told to the Duchess concerning the death of Captain St. Auburn till long after, when, if she noticed it at all, it was only among other casualties.

The Duke himself imparted the whole truth to Lord Learnington, and May knew that he had done so, when he again presented himself, very simply, as one of the family.

He wisely said but little, and allowed time to act for him, and May became so accustomed to his attentions to herself, and to expect his assistance for the Duchess as



she recovered strength daily, that the fact of their engagement was soon imparted to the household by Pauline.

Her astonishment was very great, when she received orders to pack up the beautiful things from the great wardrobe, and despatch them with great haste to Paris shawls, unmade silks, laces, and lingerie; and more surprise was in store for her, when proper artistes came to take orders from the Duchess, to provide an exquisite trousseau, to be prepared at short notice, for the wedding of Lady May Givendale with Lord Leamington.





CHAPTER XXXL

THESE affairs had caused some delay, and Helvetia wrote to her friend Lady May, saying—

"You are very long in coming to Paris. We, that means Mrs. Cave and myself, have been romancing about you, joined by a very singular person who came to Paris lately.

"Are you aware that you have kept me for many days without news? In return for which I act in a Bible manner—that is, good for evil—and give you some. Lord Grousland has prepared a different sort of friend for you—he has taken away the crown of thorns, and buried it. Dear May, the old time is over; I am not going back



to America: and, never remind me of a promise, I made once to you. With the crown of thorns, I buried the old mystery; and I hold myself absolved by you. I retain my nationality, and shall 'look ahead,' but never back.

"I have to thank you, May, for my happiness, and I am very happy. Lord Grousland has written to the Duke, and he looks over all my faults, and has himself mended my heart, which is quite solid now, and in excellent health and condition.

"I have no trousseau, dear May, and I suppose that is rather shocking to English people, so will you give some orders to your schools and such places ? My height is the same as yours. I am not to go back with the General and Mrs. Cave, and as I have no near relatives, I had no one else to consult. We are to remain here for the present. I love Paris, and must wait for you; in fact, Lord Grousland made me marry him last Thursday; the General 298

gave me to him at the Embassy church, and as it is to be in *The Times* and *Galignani* to-morrow, I tell to my one friend this happy phase in the story of

"HELVETIA."

May telegraphed one word, "*Félicitations*"; and the boxes were sent off as soon as possible, containing all the new things that May had bought in readiness for her own intended bridal with Ernest.

They were suitable for Helvetia, and the Duchess wrote an Ode, to send with them, expressing her kind wishes for the happy pair, and representing that Aladdin's lamp had been superseded in modern times, and a *corbeille de maringe* was prepared in fairy-like quick time, without the assistance of the old lamps or the ugly genii.

The Duke sent a parure of diamonds, which brought another set into Lady Grousland's eyes—at least her husband called them so, as he kissed them away, and Helvetia said, she was "glad the Duke's were more durable."

She wrote to express her gratitude to him for all his kindness, and to Lady May by the same post.

Her long letter ended with these words, after describing a good deal, and giving May and the Duchess affectionate thanks—

"My husband has endowed me with all his worldly goods, but he has added to them a little Scotch terrier, called 'Rags.' He sent to Scotland for him; and 'a vera respectable mon,' named Andrew Mac Jameson, is quite a new delight to me, for he is perfectly free and independent in Paris, and his remarks are charming. He is one of 'ours,' and I do love 'retainers.' The dog is very lively, and is not to end his days as poor Tatters did."

When sufficient time had been given for the hastiest preparations that were compatible with such an event, May was married to Lord Learnington at St. George's Church, Hanover Square, so very quietly that people asked each other "why it was?" and answered each other "that it was on account of the delicate health of the Duchess."

May's delicacy dictated it, because she felt for Ernest's mother, and her sad mourning, and the Duchess was very glad to be spared the trouble of filling her house with guests, as she would have wished to do had the ceremony taken place at Aldborough Castle.

May, dutiful to the Duchess, proceeded with her southward on her own wedding journey.

So when she met Helvetia in Paris, both were changed, for both had given up with the old love, the sorrow of the past : and they were thankful for unexpected blessings, which had come to promise for them both, —a happy future.

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THE END.



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